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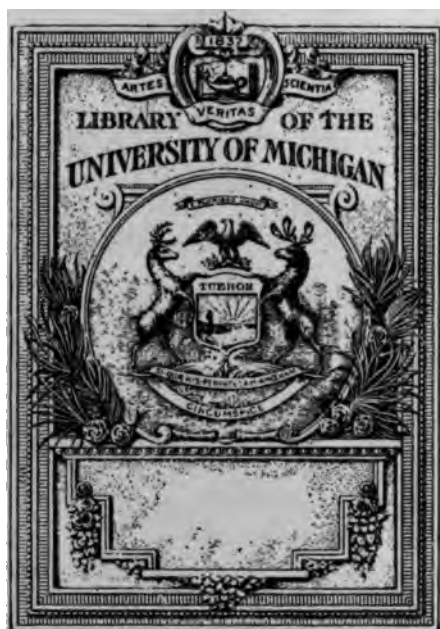
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JANUARY

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THE

DRAMATIST

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TENTH YEAR!

The Dramatist

A Journal of Dramatology

LUTHER B. ANTHONY, Editor

Vol. X

EASTON, PA.

No. 1

QUARTERLY

1919

JANUARY

"FLU" NUMBER.

Our October, 1918 issue was "Flu" number. It passed quietly away in the midst of the frightful epidemic. From this dating, the January issue will be the first number of each Volume, as follows: January, 1919, Volume X, Number 1. Formerly the first number of each Volume was the October issue.

THE BETROTHAL.*

A Play for the Printed Page.

In this play Maeterlinck flirts with eugenics, genealogy, biology and evolution, but lacks as he lacks in all his plays that thing which differentiates Drama. He lacks the magic stroke which lets us experience rather than hear the story. We hear and think "The Betrothal," or feast on thought, if you will, but we feel emotionally nothing. The average playgoer sees only the traditional stage meaning in the thing and therefore loses all that esthetic beauty which comes to the reader in a closet who may think and ponder. He does not catch the underlying theme. How can he? The province of an audience is not to think. Except along the lines laid out by the playwright. In reality you dream and slumber if the dramatist plies his craft.

Maeterlinck asks you to compose his dream for

you. To those who are able to do this, his subject may not seem too sacred for public utterance. But the average playgoer does not bring this imaginative faculty to the theatre. He goes there to get it. And there are some subtle touches that should not be left to the fleeting voice of Dialog. They escape even the thinking mind. They are more secure on the printed page.

Problem.

1. A boy feels no love.
2. His genealogy puts him wise.
3. He woos a wealthy neighbor's daughter.

This is as much as Maeterlinck cares about Conflict. There is none, not even of a fairytale type. There is no creature in whom we can merge ourselves and our sympathies. It is necessary even in a fable to make it possible for the spectator to identify himself, even his whimsical self, with the hero of the allegory. There is little in Tytyl to awaken even a fanciful sympathy. He is too overtaxed with the author's pet theories. "The Betrothal" is a highbrow fantasy.

*Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, \$1.50.

THREE FACES EAST.

By a Movie Playmaker.

So far we have had more screen plays by stage writers than stage plays by screen writers. If Anthony J. Kelly's first Broadway hit is a fair example, the movie playwright does well to shift his trade. As a mystery drama, "Three Faces East" has no rival in current playmaking. Surprise is deftly agitated and Suspense is sustained by valid use of Expectation. The Technic is legitimate. In other words, *the audience is continually baffled, while Expect-*

ancy steadily throbs in the right direction. The characters that we want to be right are right, but the exquisite craft of the playwright makes us repeatedly abandon hope though not faith in our hopes.

To accomplish this feat without willfully deceiving the audience (as in "Under Cover" for instance) is no mean trick. No doubt the director has had much to do with this technical adjustment. Sam Forrest is a proscenium playwright. He writes by right of rehearsal. Many of the intricate inventions of this tricky plot were doubtless made by him as the picture unfolded in the flesh. Its lines are not its richest achievement. Its sudden surprises, suspensions and specters are the ingredients that go to make it the greatest puzzle drama of its time. It might be possible for a new author to turn out such a marvel of mystery, but it is more likely the clever collaboration of a veteran stage craftsman.

EYES OF YOUTH.

Playing at Playmaking.

There is such a thing as playing at playmaking and this unusual panoramic performs that fascinating game. The auditor listens to a Yogi's crystal prophesy and the next scene presents that phase of life which Fate decrees the heroine. This process goes on at length, the only Unity in the succession of "gazes" being the one woman concerned. There is no tendency to combine seances, no intention of blending them into one digestible whole. In fact there is little progress, much digress and some regress in the amiable Sequence of this piece.

The authors amuse, amaze and confuse all to no *intelligent end*. There is the simulated caprice of

the movie, nimbly flitting from one place to the next; but who would deny the flicker drama its par excellence in this facility. "Eyes of Youth" is one of those occasional violations of dramatology which wins out on its flagrant force of transgression. Incidentally it affords a fascinating actress oodles of opportunity.

A TAILOR-MADE MAN.

A Master-made Play.

Like most Cohan & Harris products this play goes one better than your best guess. And that is the essence of Climax building; to go your audience one better. It takes the poor apprentice from his tailor's bench to the crest of his aspirations and then drops him with a dull thud. But he bobs up again in a most unexpected fashion. His peculiar talents find a demand and he is prevailed upon to supply. The conclusion is more than gratifying and our satisfaction is overfull.

Problem.

1. A tailor poses as a reformer.
2. His sham is found out.
3. His true talents are disclosed.

Next to the wonderful concept of this Problem is the minute detail with which each separate Scene is worked out. Take, for instance, our wingy little hero's intrusion into the home of a magnate. His tailor-made resourcefulness is immense. He is repeatedly doing the undoable. If any of these progressive steps were assigned to an amateur the chances are he would pronounce them insoluble. Yet Harry James Smith has solved each one delightfully and given us a hunch how to handle our t plot conundrum.

AIDA.**All to the Ear.**

The playgoer attending this opera with no previous knowledge of the language or story could not obtain one single jot of meaning from the melange of song, play and spectacle. If he should read the libretto afterward he might find great difficulty in reconciling it to the thing he had witnessed.

Problem.

1. A woman is jealous of a rival.
2. She exposes her treachery.
3. This kills the man they both love.

The Moral of this Recoil is somewhat warped. For doing the right thing in the wrong intent, Amnaris is visited by Retribution. Her motive is jealousy, not patriotism. The trend of the Conflict being abnormal it would be hard to Dramatize it with wholly visual acting or pantomime. If Right were allied to correct motive the stage narrative might be more legible. But it is not the design of opera composers to employ the Visual. They frankly recommend the libretto. You are supposed to prompt yourself. The acting does not assume to enlighten the uninitiated. Opera is preeminently an exclusive art. Music has first place and those who do not aspire or pretend to appreciate melody are frankly invited to refrain. Nevertheless, a day will come when composers will realize the need of theatric medium, and that medium is sight. They will cease to depend upon memorized legend and learn to engage the eye.

FRIENDLY ENEMIES.**Cools With War Fervor.**

Now that the glamor of war is off it is easier to feel the loose joints in "Friendly Enemies." Particularly is this true of a road company with unknown stars in the leading parts. Comic Opera logic is less noticeable when Mann and Bernard are in it because these two comedians have been inseparably associated with this line of folderol. Louis Mann can say: "All the world is fools excepting me." But any other actor would be required to leave off the last two words. They belong to the other fellow. Then the false line becomes Dialog. The play has numerous instances of monolog where a split in the line would make good Dialog. It is the shifting of war prejudice that allows us to detect these errors now. We swallowed them whole while alien hatred was rampant.

THE NAUGHTY WIFE.**Not True to Form.**

Flaws are so numerous in this play that it is futile to pick them. This is invariably true where the fundamentals are wrong. The only possibility of making it a play that lives up to the pledge implied by its title is to bring the said wife to some dire dilemma that would adequately requite her inane foolishness. Her tragedy should be real to her no matter how safely the husband guards her.

Problem.

1. A wife elopes with another man.
2. The husband chaperones them.
3. His common sense saves her.

There is really no climax to the Plot. And this *ubtedly* is a big factor in the play's failure.

Others have succeeded on slimmer resources, but here we have breach of promise plus Plot inertia. Human nature seems to demand a Climax in domestic drama. In other words, something should come of it. Mr. Jackson writes a lot of clever dialog but having no Conflict to hang it on his satire is ill suited. Laughs are valuable but they may be neutralized by a structure that does not ring true to the core. This play acts like a farce but involves emotions that contradict its classification.

EVERYWOMAN.

An Epoch Making Morality.

After a decade of playgoing approval it seems late to review this successful spectacle, but so many readers have requested it that we shall venture an estimate in a very few words.

Problem.

1. A woman seeks love.
2. She mistakes it for riches.
3. She finds it at home.

The third clause is a happy ending tacked on to give the poor soul a favorable finish. It does not take its origin in the first two parts. To make this ending inevitable the agency of love should be sustained throughout the play. This is the technical weakness of the structure. The normal ending for the first two clauses is a tragedy. She seeks love. She is misled by riches. She is abandoned when her attractiveness vanishes.

But this is merely a lack of technic. This should not blind us to its beauty of text, its nobility of teaching and its sincerity of intent. The play practically represents an author's life work; Mr. Browne died before it became a success. His play may not

impart a proxy experience, but it registers a Moral that is difficult to dodge. The parable drives its message straight home. Mr. Savage maintains the high quality of production even in this tenth year of its performance and his fidelity no doubt has much to do with the integrity of the piece.

HEARTS OF THE WORLD.

A Meaningless Movie.

Mr. Griffith seems unfortunate in the texture of his stories. At any rate, this latest spectacle is entirely too chaotic. Now the British, now the French, now the Americans come dashing into the audience, just so many senseless jumpingjacks incited principally by the turbulent music of the orchestra. And the orchestra has a lot to do with it. It blinds, to a degree, our consciousness of the ramshackle sequence of abstract events.

The love story is in fair Unity, but the rest of the picture contributes too little to it. To attempt to shrink the world war into a background for this slender thread of romance makes neither a movie nor a war review. The jumble may have come in the endeavor to merge successful bits of actual photography or it may simply be an editorial blunder in joining these fragments. At any rate, each succeeding picture made by this renowned producer since *The Birth of a Nation* fails more dismally than the last. Is he unable to grasp the principle of Unity or does the magnitude of his materials bewilder him? Strive for Unity, Mr. Griffith; it is the one thing that stands between you and artistic triumph.

SHE WALKED IN HER SLEEP.**A Fable of Manufactured Fun.**

Probably the best example of artificial farce extant is this old-fashioned effort by Mark Swan. And by effort we mean obvious effort, effort at the expense of plot and plausibility. When an author is compelled to make snickering simpletons of his bystanders in order to boost the lead along, it is about time to call in the phonograph for comedy.

The direct method of doing things outranges the amateur in this structure. Instead of the inevitable the author's will invariably rules. This is the obverse of dramatic technic. Complications creak with heavy labor and frequently slip the trail to keep the action up. Such specimens of mock convulsiveness are things of the past and it is to be hoped that the decisive failure of this old timer will discourage further resurrections.

THE VERY IDEA.**A Frank Satire.**

The salacity of a subject has no place in technical analysis so long as the theme warrants. Eugenics is a frank science and many apparent indelicacies are legitimate to it. It is out of this indelicacy that the author has capitalized his Dialog; lines that are not technically valid, but invariably swift in spontaneous satire.

Problem.

1. A couple employ proxy parents.
2. They abscond during incubation.
3. They become parents in fact.

To illustrate one of the funniest points in this play *let us jump to the conclusion*. At the end of *the third act* after the proxy mother has refused to

part with her new born babe, the wife imparts the news that she is to become a mother, and two characters say:

By George, it's a wonderful state.

What, motherhood?

No, California.

The meaning is truculent, but it strikes the highest pitch of the play. It signifies talent not to be despised in the theatre and denotes more theatric instinct than any other turn in the entire product.

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON.*

Published at Popular Price.

Students will be glad to learn that it is no longer necessary to pay a fabulous price for this greatest Barrie satire. A neat little book has been put on the market and nearly all of his plays are to follow in this popular priced form.

*Scribner's, New York, \$1.

JOHNNY GET YOUR GUN.

Two-reel Comedy in Flesh.

If it were the author's intention to place a two-reel movie on the spoken stage this script need not be materially altered. That is about what it all amounts to. Everyone does just about what the hero wants them to, much like Broncho Billy in the cow-punching flicker drama. The Plot is a male variant of "Peg 'O My Heart." A boy instead of a girl saves the naughty man from eloping with the daughter of the household. There is really very little food for technical thought in the play. We review it because we are requested to do so. The piece is made possible by the movies and may succeed in interesting patrons of the picture show. It is not of compromise between farce and film.

MORE STAGE LITERATURE.

Edited by Montrose J. Moses.

American publishers are making up for lost time in giving us a literature of the stage. In two very valuable collections of plays, twelve rare American and twenty-one British dramas have been added to the increasing library of printed manuscripts. The first is called "Representative Plays by American Dramatists,"* the second is "Representative British Dramas, Victorian and Modern."** A glance at the contents of the latter shows a number of well-known plays that have not heretofore been available in the text. The student is offered a brief history of the author and of the stage of his respective epoch. The book is a college course in dramatic literature.

Contents.

- 1820—**VIRGINIUS.** James Sheridan Knowles.
1828—**BLACK-EYED SUSAN;** or, All in the Downs. Douglas Jerrold.
1839—**RICHELIEU;** or, The Conspiracy. Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton.
1841—**LONDON ASSURANCE.** Dion Boucicault.
1843—**A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.** Robert Browning.
1863—**THE TICKET-OF-LEAVE MAN.** Tom Taylor.
1867—**CASTE.** T. W. Robertson.
1878—**H. M. S. PINAFORE;** or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor. W. S. Gilbert.
1893—**BECKET.** Alfred Tennyson.
1894—**THE MASQUERADERS.** Henry Arthur Jones.
1895—**THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.** Oscar Wilde.
1899—**THE GAY LORD QUEX.** Arthur Wing Pinero.
1906—**THE SILVER BOX.** John Galsworthy.
1907—**THE CASSIUS ENGAGEMENT.** St. John Hankin.
1910—**THE MADRAS HOUSE.** H. Granville Barker.
1910—**THE TRAGEDY OF POMPEY THE GREAT.** John Masefield.
1902—**CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN.** William Butler Yeats.
1904—**RIDERS TO THE SEA.** John M. Synge.
1906—**THE WORKHOUSE WARD.** Lady Augusta Gregory.
1910—**THOMAS MUSKERRY.** Padraic Colum.
1913—**THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN.** Lord Dunsany.

The Plays of American Dramatists may not be

as good reading, but are surely a greater contribution to literature so far as our domestic drama is concerned. No former book has given as comprehensive a survey of the native effort from 1765 to 1819 and the Introduction to this volume and to each author represented in it throws a new light on the incubating period of American Drama.

Contents.

- 1765—THE PRINCE OF PARTHIS. Thomas Godfrey, Jr.
1766—PONTEACH. Robert Rogers.
1775—THE GROUP. Mrs. Mercy Warren.
1776—THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL. Hugh Henry Brackenridge.
1776—THE FALL OF BRITISH TYRANNY. John Leacock.
1789—THE POLITICIAN OUTWITTED. Samuel Low.
1790—THE CONTRAST. Royall Tyler.
1798—ANDRE. William Dunlap.
1808—THE INDIAN PRINCESS. J. N. Barker.
1819—SHE WOULD BE A SOLDIER. M. M. Noah.

In view of the new era of Liberty these early war and political plays of the '76 period will be doubly interesting to us. We can feel the pulse better when the throb of a like impulse is upon us.

The publisher is evidently doing his part and possibly more; for there is no certainty of a profit in venturing on these works. Let the student be sure that he is doing his share by making the market inviting. Secure these books and own your own library. Put an end to that everlasting cry that we have no stage literature by demonstrating the contrary on your own shelves. The last eight years have done more to refute this fallacy than any twenty years that have gone before.

*E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, \$3.

**Little, Brown & Co., Boston, \$4.



APRIL
1919

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QUARTERLY

1919

APRIL

THE THIRTY-SIX SITUATIONS.*

By Polti.

Just why Polti calls them situations is not quite clear and this may be a discrepancy of the translation. English writers call most anything a Scene, for instance. This book might better be called a Thesaurus of Plot Foundations. At any rate it is a very interesting study of the various subjects that have been treated in plays even though some of them have become more or less obsolete since Greek drama dropped her curtain. We will outline briefly the thirty-six categories of Plots as they appear in Polti's list, which he says cover the whole sphere of dramatization.

I.

SUPPLICATION—A Persecutor, a Suppliant and a Power in Authority.

II.

DELIVERANCE—An Unfortunate, a Threatener, a Rescuer.

III.

CRIME PURSUED BY VENGEANCE—An Avenger and a Criminal.

IV.

VENGEANCE TAKEN FOR KINDRED UPON KINDRED—Avenging Kinsman, Guilty Kinsman, Remembrance of the Victim, a Relative or Both.

V.

PURSUIT—Punishment and Fugitive.

VI.

DISASTER—A Vanquished Power, a Victorious Enemy or a Messenger.

VII.

FALLING PREY TO CRUELTY OR MISFORTUNE—An Unfortunate, a Master or a Misfortune.

VIII.

REVOLT—Tyrant and Conspirator.

IX.

DARING ENTERPRISE—A Bold Leader, an Object; an Adversary.

X.

ABDUCTION—The Abductor, the Abducted; the Guardian.

XI.

THE ENIGMA—Interrogator, Seeker and Problem.

XII.

OBTAINING—A Solicitor and an Adversary Who is Refusing, or an Arbitrator and Opposing Parties.

XIII.

ENMITY OF KINSMEN—A Malevolent Kinsman, a Hated or Reciprocally Hating Kinsman.

XIV.

RIVALRY OF KINSMEN—The Preferred Kinsman, the Rejected Kinsman; the Object.

XV.

MURDEROUS ADULTERY—Two Adulterers, a Betrayed Husband or Wife.

XVI.

MADNESS—Madman and Victim.

XVII.

FATAL IMPRUDENCE—The Imprudent, the Victim or the Object Lost.

XVIII.

INVOLUNTARY CRIMES OF LOVE—The Lover, the Beloved; the Revealer.

XIX.

SLAYER OF A KINSMAN UNRECOGNIZED—The Slayer, the Unrecognized Victim.

XX.

SELF-SACRIFICE FOR AN IDEAL—The Hero, the Ideal, the "Creditor" Person or Thing Sacrificed.

XXI.

SELF-SACRIFICE FOR KINDRED—The Hero, the Kinsman, the "Creditor" or the Person or Thing Sacrificed.

XXII.

ALL SACRIFICED FOR A PASSION—The Lover, the Object of the Fatal Passion; the Thing Sacrificed.

XXIII.

NECESSITY OF SACRIFICING LOVED ONES—The Hero, the Beloved Victim; the Necessity for the Sacrifice.

XXIV.

RIVALRY OF SUPERIOR AND INFERIOR—The Superior Rival, the Inferior Rival; the Object.

XXV.

ADULTERY—A Deceived Husband or Wife; Two Adulterers.

XXVI.

CRIMES OF LOVE—The Lover, the Beloved.

XXVII.

DISCOVERY OF THE DISHONOR OF A LOVED ONE—The Discoverer, the Guilty One.

XXVIII.

OBSTACLES TO LOVE—Two Lovers, an Obstacle.

XXIX.

AN ENEMY LOVED—The Beloved Enemy, the Lover; the Hater.

XXX.

AMBITION—An Ambitious Person, a Thing Coveted; an Adversary.

XXXI.

STRUGGLE AGAINST A GOD—A Mortal, an Immortal.

XXXII.

MISTAKEN JEALOUSY—The Jealous One, the Object of Whose Possession He is Jealous, the Supposed Accomplice; the Cause or the Author of the Mistake.

XXXIII.

ERRONEOUS JUDGMENT—The Mistaken One, the Victim of the Mistake, the Cause or Author of the Mistake; the Guilty Person.

XXXIV.

REMORSE—The Culprit, the Victim or the Sin; the Interrogator.

XXXV.

RECOVERY OF A LOST ONE—The Seeker, the One Found.

XXXVI.

LOSS OF LOVED ONES—A Kinsman Slain, a Kinsman Spectator; an Executioner.

This list covers practically all the plots that have at times been compiled by Gozzi, Goethe and Schiller. Most modern plots fit into one of these forms and the classification is sure to be of value to the aspirant. Each class has numerous subdivisions and a carefully compiled index both to author and to plays adds intrinsically to the value of the publication.

*The Editor Co., Ridgewood, N. J., \$1.

A BURGOMASTER OF BELGIUM.**Why Does it Fail to Grip?**

This play is published under the title "The Burgomaster of Stilemonde."* The production has undergone some changes not made in the book and we shall therefore use the printed version for study. Fundamentally the changes do not matter. Maeterlinck evidently wrote the play as it is published and it is the author that interests us more than the retouching of his work. A poet's attempt at legitimate drama is always interesting. The dramatic instinct is seldom synonymous with poetic genius. Maeterlinck must be treated as an amateur in this field, therefore, since true technic is entirely new to him, and fundamental Conflict is not his forte.

Problem.

1. A gardener is charged with military murder.
2. The Burgomaster takes the blame.
3. He faces the firing squad.

This is all there is of direct Problem or Conflict. e is subsidiary Conflict born wholly of Maeter-

linck's poetic fancy. But the beliefs of the audience and motives of his characters are not involved. Is this the reason why the play does not grip us? Of course, the conclusion is a tragedy and Americans are not keen on pessimistic endings. If Maeterlinck intends to show anything by his *Moral* he has successfully concealed it from the humble heart of the playgoer who can only imbibe meanings from the proxy experience of the depicted Conflict.

Maeterlinck seems to have drawn his lesson rather from the secondary story of a Belgian girl wedded to a German officer. She rejects him even after he is honorable enough to offer his life rather than be the unwilling agency of killing her father. If this was Maeterlinck's lesson it is still obscure so far as the playgoer is concerned. The subconscious *Moral* is perpetual hate. The discerning reader might get a mental lesson from the book, but as a play its theme is amateurish. The author aims at something above his theatric skill. He has not conveyed his meaning, for he has not transmitted it in composite language.

The thing that Maeterlinck has established in his three-act tragedy is a very stalwart picture of a Burgomaster who knew how to face the sacrifice of death. He draws a wonderful character of the stoic father in a scene that lacks conviction in every other element. The father stands out as a marvel of tolerance and open-mindedness against all the cruelties of military barbarism. This quality levels even his enmity and paints a monumental nobility of the Burgomaster quite in keeping with the exalted ideals we hold of courageous Belgium. It is easy to see how a poet might be carried away with this inspiring portrait even to the degree of employing false sacrifices and purposeless deaths. The

play has little power for the theatre as a play. Its virtues are mostly isolated instances of acute agony and consummate tolerance.

*Dodd, Meade & Co., New York, \$1.75.


I LOVE YOU.

Not Culminated in a Climax.

So many farces start out with hopeful promise, but fail to fulfil at the Climax. This is the chief defect in "I Love You" which is being tried on the road preparatory to entering a New York playhouse. The idea is so pregnant with possibilities that the dullest wit in the audience easily outdistances the author in his attempt. In "The Very Idea" William LeBaron makes this same point the height of his achievement. He caps the climax with one better than the best bet. He exceeds the imagination of the shrewdest auditor. This is what he could do in "I Love You," but only a complete rebuilding will attain it. The hard rehearsing of some director who writes as he rehearses might help some.

Problem.

1. A man wagers that atmosphere begets love.
2. His experiment unites the wrong couples.
3. He loses his bet.

There are times in Act I that we expect a veritable "Admirable Crichton" of the butler whom the family call upon to answer the office of an encyclopædia. The promise is rich in possibilities and the audience sets its expectations entirely too high for the meager consummation that follows. Of course, the unrehearsed state of the manuscript  accounts for some of this disappointment, but the s not there. The germ itself must be hatched

if a good play is to come of it, and this germ usually resides in the Climax. It is for this reason that all great playwrights have advised that you write your third act first. It is a fact that you must at least see the *End* before being sure of your beginning. In this instance the author or producer is still confronted with the need of finding the ending. This means, of course, the Climax. What can the complicity of Plot ripen into? If you successfully *laugh* an audience through three whole acts and land them nowhere, the breach of promise is evident. It should culminate in a scream.

There are instances of bright Dialog and spots of good entertainment. There are also great spaces of tiresome *talk*, all of which might be properly fixed in due process of rehearsal. But none of these things count against the concept of the farce as a whole. If you haven't a Play you haven't the parts of a play, for the parts are only equal to the whole and the whole to its parts.

THE DANCER.

Problem with Repeated Crisis.

One of the strangest structures ever issued from the pen of an experienced playwright is this new offering by Edward J. Locke. It has a repeated Climax and no conclusion. We do not recall ever encountering such a suspended termination. The third clause of the syllogism is indefinitely postponed.

Problem.

1. A Puritan marries a dancer.
2. He denounces her vulgar companions.
3. He denounces her vulgar companions.

And strange to say, the basis of this repeated clause is the weakest motive in the whole Plot. The man has no reason for denouncing save that he is a Puritan in his breeding. The dancer is chaste and attractive in every way and the audience beseeches him to renounce his empty objections, but the author actuates him even in defiance of the conscience of the crowd. He does it twice. The first time it stirs Suspense. The second time it outrages emotion. No American lays much store by a man who renounces a perfectly charming wife simply because of his prudishness or because her companions are revolting. The world has revolved several ages past that fetish. The audience loves the woman more than her husband and wants her love gratified even if the hero does seem unworthy of such an idol. To ask them to accept this flimsy objection as the prime motive of the Climax thoroughly undermines the Play. And Martha Hedman's exquisite embodiment of the wife only emphasizes the fallacy. No rational man could reject her "Lola" on the scant grounds presented. At least no such man is dramatizable.

But we must not overlook the incidental merits of the piece. The first act starts off like a masterpiece. The gradation is smooth and patient and the unfolding of conditions is exceedingly artistic. The second act reaches the crisis already mentioned and the third instead of counteracting this stupid prejudice and making a nobler man of him, keeps up the petty nonsense of this precious simpleton and sends us away completely depressed with the pessimism of the author. His Plot does not evolve this perversity. It is popular with no one but the
hor.

TEA FOR THREE.**Old School Construction.**

It is not by mere accident that Roi Cooper Megrue's new play pleases the public. By the use of time honored technic he constructs Scene upon Scene so well seasoned with Suspense that his Climax ultimately attained thoroughly saturates us with satisfaction. Fads may come and fads may go, but this honest well-built brand of drama is always in fashion. Like other staple commodities it must be put up in current packages and this precaution has been well observed in "Tea for Three."

Problem.

1. A wife is forbidden a male companion.
2. He feigns suicide.
3. The husband is reconciled.

The very substance of this Problem implies artifice. Mr. Megrue makes no bones about it, his characters are fully sophisticated and countless discrepancies creep into the manuscript that would seem invalid in everyday life. But the mood is frankly a frivolous one and these liberties are granted. And despite this fact, the plot reaches repeated situations that grip and move the audience even while absurdity lingers. This is skill: to dabble with Drama in such flippant fashion, and still hold an audience.

Were it not for this avowed flirtation with technic the play's moral would not be highly salutary. If dramatized in full force the lesson of "Tea for Three" says that it is all right for a frivolous wife to play with fire in the flesh of a self-confessed philanderer. This is negative example for the young wives of our half developed civilization.

But the experience is not depicted seriously. The art of the playwright has successfully offset this inherent Moral. The subconscious effect is submerged in the quick comedy and jovial good humor of a frankly false Conflict. It is a satire on hen-pecked wives rather than a teaching for them to follow. "Tea for Three" will probably prove the best built play of the season—restricting the comparison to plays, not mere stage stories.

THE AFTERMATH.

Endorsed by the Government.

Any play that a government official endorses is likely to turn out more propaganda than practice. "The Aftermath" is all of this plus an extremely amateurish technic. It might be indexed as an excellent study of false suppression of plot fact. The fact that the hero is a syphilitic is stayed off beyond all demands of dramatic instinct. The author mistakes this delay for a technical efficiency, whereas the Suspense that should be engendered is another note entirely.

Problem.

1. A syphilitic is betrothed.
2. He contends that he is cured.
3. A test postpones the marriage.

The Moral of this play, if there is any, prescribes that a girl engaged to an infected man should wait till the disease is banished. Is there any sense or interest in such a lesson? Does it tally with human emotion? Would the girl who is revolted at such a *discovery* be likely to pledge her word to wait for

cure? Is there anything at all dramatic in this material or is it an effort to capitalize upon the publicity of a topic customarily treated with loathing and secrecy? This seems to be the only excuse for perpetrating such a Problem. If true Suspense were intended or a real moral desired, there is nothing like the actual tragedy of the taint to implant the lesson. And such tragedy implies the marriage of the victims and its pathologic results. To merely avert the marriage does not offer a moral of intrinsic value to an audience. Perhaps the tragic treatment could be just as vapid for the American play-going public. The place for such propaganda is the clinic, not the stage.

REMNANT.

The Poorest Playwriting Produced.

Unquestionably "Remnant" is the poorest specimen of play building produced in a long time. Most of its characters are irrelevant and unrelated to the plot, and few if any of its incidents are worked out to a dramatic finish. Situation after situation is passed undramatized and happening after happening is plumped in, not emanating from the Conflict.

It is not exaggerating to say that scenes and characters drift into the picture would fit just as well in some other play. These are doubtless the attempts to retain the high spots of entertainment

from the London performance while Americanizing the manuscript. The theatrical distance between Britain and America is a billion leagues.

Problem.

1. A waif admires a poor inventor.
2. He sacrifices his fortune to protect her.
3. *She retrieves it and his love.*

Here is the one tangible thread of plot in the play. There are several faint rivals of Conflict, but none of them endures. And even this Problem is not a very sturdy one. The play is not designed as such. The fault lies not in its inception, however, but in the execution thereof. Feeble as it is, the Problem is miserably carried out. The charm and quaintness that should be great factors in the action are repeatedly blunted by indifferent technic. Any old way seems to be the ideal of the authors. They hold themselves to no standards of excellence in construction or Dialog.

At times the incongruities of the piece sink to near burlesque. When an inventor is seen living in a dingy apartment with two women, one a mistress and the other a chaste pauper, is it any wonder that an audience is set at sea so far as grasp of sense is concerned. But this is the Parisian way, it might be argued. Very well, if foreign manners and customs are permissible why not speak the lines in French? The one is as outlandish as the other. American plays must be done in our language. If customs in keeping with our conscience are not adhered to, the incongruous element should be explained within the limits of the play. For we might as well write in Greek as to enact Grecian conundrums.

SICK-A-BED.

Imitation Movie Mixup.

"Sick-a-bed" is one of those old-fashioned farces relying on horseplay for horsepower. It attempts to rival the movie in claptrap complications, but the mirth produced is nowhere near as genuine as a Charlie Chaplin film. Why invade the field of the *movie actor*? He can trick these stunts to so much

better advantage. At best it is a poor imitation of the flicker farce.

THE VOICE OF McCONNELL.

Chauncey Olcott Dramatized.

As an extreme instance of writing to fit a particular player, his voice and his traditional limitations, this is a most flourishing example. Not only have the authors and retouchers gauged Mr. Olcott's capabilities, but they have flavored the piece with the traditional Irish ingredients that have composed his plays for a generation. The result should be analyzed more with a view to the success of this attempt rather than its intrinsic merits as drama. The whole plot has the usual flimsy traits of romantic Irish melodrama done in dime novel style. The product might be called a musical comedy head on melodramatic shoulders. Our readers will enjoy studying its close comparison to "Blind Youth" in the matter of blackmailing the younger brother of the hero.

FLUSH THEATRICAL OVERFLOW.

Poor Plays Prevail.

How happy the managers are! New York is crowded with out-of-town folks, thousands being added to the usual transient population by the returning soldiers and those who come to meet them. To most of these New York means theatre-going, and theatre-going without much discrimination or advance information. To the question, "What's a good show?" most of our visitors take any one's answer, and are quite as likely to be guided by the barber or the bootblack as by someone who knows. *If they can't get into one theatre they try the next,*

with the general result that the poor entertainments are thriving quite as well as the best.

This means prosperity for the theatres, but it is a drug rather than a stimulant for the art of the theatre. A number of attractions are enjoying long runs which in normal times would have been evicted by the theatrical landlord in the first week or fortnight of their careers. Playwrights with works of genius in their hands are standing in long lines outside of managerial offices, waiting for a hearing, but the managers are too busy counting the receipts of the plays in performance to worry much about those in embryo.

In one way this is bad for dramatic art. The undeserved success of a poor play is more damaging than the undeserved failure of a good one. Among managers the box-office is such an infallible measuring-stick that the mediocrity now making money for many theatres bids fair to crowd out better things for some time to come. From current attractions it is easy to pick out quite a few whose authors are going to cost the managers a good bit of money when things get back to the normal and New York's theatres have to get their patronage from a more discriminating public.

There's one comfort about the situation. The managers are piling up so much money that they are going to have quite a lot for future experiments.

—*Life*.

PLAYREADINGS.

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Playreading Department,
THE DRAMATIST, Easton, Pa.



JULY
1919

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THE

DRAMATISTS

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TENTH YEAR!

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DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE.*

By George Pierce Baker.

Professor Baker of Harvard University has given the best book to date on playwriting. It should not be called "Dramatic Technique" because it does not deal deeply with the technic of the subject. It deals with the writing. It is a discussion of the experiences, the very valuable experiences of a teacher of dramatic literature interested largely in idea drama. Instead of any formulated theory on the subject observations from scores of plays and experiments are offered. This attitude toward play-building leaves the impression in the mind of the reader that the author's process is one of dramatizing a story rather than building an independent entity known as a play. The good that is to be gained from his work, then, is the review of world-wide literature, instead of aid offered the floundering aspirant. He does not say, here are the tools, go ahead and use them. He points to the parts in the finished product and says, assemble them likewise. He is not so much concerned with fundamental principle of construction as with the actual language of the characters.

And there may be a reason for this. Mr. Baker has *been a college instructor and lecturer all his life.*

Rhetorical polish has been his chief pursuit. This vocation naturally leads to a worship of words and ideas and an aversion for commonplace entertainment. The drama is democratic and relies wholly upon *Feelings* that are foreign to a mental type. The intellectualist lives in his mind and by the very nature of this habitation is incapacitated for reciprocity with the vital types of mankind. Isn't it perfectly natural, then, that his attention should be centered on the spiritual ingredients rather than the physical side of this craft. We all have our particular tastes which are influenced largely by environment. Specializing for twenty-five years in polished speech does not tend to divorce one from the fluent use of language. In Professor Baker's case it has confined him to the *Soul* of the play with little or no thought to the *Body*.

Bearing these facts in mind it will be easy to see why our own American masterpieces are conspicuous for their absence in this volume. Broadway successes are ignored because they do not offer much spiritual fodder for dramatic literature. Yet no finer physical patterns of Scene structure can be found. All the annals of the past contain no such examples of technic as American dramatists have evolved in the last ten years. And this is said with all due reverence to a study of the past which is the principal epoch covered by Professor Baker's book. Many things have conspired, however, to make old methods musty and new methods unique. The moving picture is not the least of these. Drama is the *Doing*, and the *Here and Now* is of prime importance to the present-day play. The recited narration of off-stage events can never be true Drama no matter how poetically worded. The Visual dominates the oral and Dialog is at its best only when it

augments the picture. These are all principles of the new technic which are little practiced in obsolete plays. Past masterpieces relied so wholly upon recitation that their monotony of words is repellent to the lazy ear of this generation. Sight travels a million times faster than sound and characterization is achieved by deeds rather than Dialog. Read "Dramatic Technique," therefore, not as a handbook on play-building but for the wealth to be gained from an entire college course of dramatic literature. Its collection of plays and excerpts is a library alone.

*Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, \$3.75.

PENROD.

Overdoing the Child Part.

If "Penrod" accomplished nothing else it demonstrated the futility of overdoing the child on the stage. One child is rarely a complete pleasure, but a bunch of them attempting to be childlike is about the most monotonous impersonation possible. This seemed to be the burden of Penrod's song—too much infancy. And while there are people who can be entertained with such fare it does not follow that they comprise an audience. An audience must be more or less hypnotized. There is no possibility of weaving a dream out of child humor with so many sure contrivances for waking us up. The strained monotony of child talk alone dispels the drama.

It would require a super-dramatist to subjugate a book by Booth Tarkington. The many tedious moments which may read well enough when you are not paying two dollars for the privilege need ample dramatic whimsy to get them by. Barrie is able to do this in *his own work*. It is doubtful whether *even he could turn the same trick on another man's*

materials. In the absence of such treatment the satire of "Penrod" becomes heavy melodrama and the fibbing parents merely malicious liars. There are several clever curtains at the ends of acts but the play as a whole succeeds in dramatizing only such souls as have dramatized themselves before coming to the theatre. They have been half hypnotized, in other words, by the printed page and the stage picture merely corroborates their homemade impressions.

SHAKUNTALA.*

Romanticized Hindu Drama.

Beware of offering as truth any love story fourteen hundred years of age for Love is a comparatively youthful swain as time is reckoned in ages. This is true of the white race. It applies even more aptly to the Hindu. Kalidasa wrote this play in Sanskrit dramatizing the hot passions of the female for her mate. To attempt any translation that turns this lust into romantic affinity naturally invites the artificial and affected. Kalidasa accurately portrays the primitive symptoms of sex attraction. The adulation of the female is based upon the crudest animal attributes. Is it any wonder, then, that the sentiment seldom convinces when done in twentieth century style. This is a mistake most adapters make in bringing ancient legends down to date. Love, like all other things has evolved gradually, and it is only a few centuries previous that no such emotion existed among the humans of the earth.

*Henry Holt & Co., N. Y., \$1.50.

TISH.

A Twin Spine Spinster.

— When the body of a play totters it is best to go *ht to the spine* to detect the malady. If the

backbone is straight the frame cannot incline. If it is fractured, the anatomy naturally limps. This is the case with the early road try-out of "Tish." She scampers along gayly for two acts and then flirts with a crutch. Let's take a look at her vertebrae.

Problem.

1. A youth is framed with bribery.
2. His fiancée's aunt rescues him.
3. She offers to go to jail to save a step-father's exposure.

It will be seen readily that the third vertebra does not fit into the main bone of the play. It is the core of another Conflict. By attempting to join these irrelevant parts we get the head of one creature and the tail of another. They do not harmonize. Instead of a perfect organism known as a play we have an aimless narrative known as a story. Even a farce must be threaded on a fairly sound skeleton if it is to hold the heart of a composite crowd. There is no rule that prescribes this, it is an inherent instinct with the audience. They follow the line of least resistance, but it must be a *line*.

By defying this instinct the author runs the risk of devitalizing the best characterization his actress is able to invest. Is it for this reason that Miss May Robson seems to be batting the wind in the third and fourth acts of "Tish" in its present state of rehearsal? Her individual efforts bring torrents of applause but the play has long since ceased to assist her. The Plot dashes off on a secondary Conflict and the star drifts helplessly in the wild currents of disunity.

What is the remedy? This question will doubtless be *answered in the alterations made en route*. "*Tish*" is the sort of playwriting that has to be per-

formed on its feet. The producers have already worked out most of the irrelevance in Acts I and II and the screams of laughter that ensue give promise of an evolving farce. If they will discard the third and fourth acts as they stand, retaining the laughs as far as possible, and merge them with a third and last act that concludes the Problem, the difficulties of disunity will soon disappear.

The play is written around Miss Robson's artistry. It is all the more essential, then, that Tish be vitally concerned in the conclusion. Most of the incidents of the last two acts may be retained if the spine of the play is corrected. In other words we only ask that the play that began in I and II be completed. We saw the start and demand the finish. Other ingredients may be very hilarious but if they do not belong our relish is retarded by the unconscious inquiry: What has become of the play we began with? Mr. Rose who adapted the Mary Roberts Rinehart stories has almost dramatized the *Saturday Evening Post*.

THE WANDERER.

A Bible Drama.

One of the few successful attempts to dramatize tales from the Bible is achieved in this excellent production. For it is the integrity of the producers as much as the dramatization that counts. Elliott, Comstock & Gest are to be congratulated even upon their small town performances. It is no mean feat to take a modern audience back to biblical times without continually jarring upon the subconsciousness of the crowd which is unfamiliar with the customs of that period. But few such incongruities disturb the spell that "The Wanderer" casts upon us.

Problem.

1. A son renounces his religion.
2. His father disowns him.
3. The boy's penitence reconciles them.

This is a very homely little story yet it is as big as the heart can hold. It is always hard to see the gripping power of a Third Law plot till it is actually done on the stage. Perhaps this is the reason so few Third Law plays succeed. Not many of them get a hearing by reason of the inability of the producer to see parental emotions in advance of a try-out. Most of the great Third Law or mother-love successes have groped around Broadway many years before finding a production. "The Wanderer" utilizes mother-love but relies chiefly upon the more general affection of family ties. The boy is so completely degraded that his own dogs bark at him. Every barrier is brought to alienate his family but still blood tells. With all his disease, his sacrilege and his degeneracy, his family reclaim him and in so doing preach one of the strongest sermons of parental love that has ever been staged in the theatre. The Third Law is the oldest and yet the newest of the vital laws of life. When restricted to the affinity between parent and child it is the prime law of love and precedes love of the sexes. When enlarged to the broader scope of the brotherhood of man it is the last word in current concepts of divinity. Is this the reason why it is so hard to pick a Third Law winner?

IN THE ZONE.***A Vividly Dramatized Skit.**

Here is a clever bit of craftsmanship which signals a *dramatic conscience*. The author has an electric *touch of characterization* and lends more literary

finish to his Dialog than most of our successful playwrights. "In The Zone" dramatizes us. We do not have to do the dramatist's duty. The play does its own dramatizing. We merely drink in the picture enacted before us. When mere words are resorted to, they stand upon the firm foundation of objects and transactions already seen. This is play-writing.

ILE.

Here is another skit by the same author which proves that a work can be dramatic without being dramatized. It stirs up a tempest in a woman's soul but does not succeed in identifying us with its heroine. It is too intangible for the composite crowd. We read the words as we would see the acting, as a story, not a dramatized slice of life.

Problem.

1. A Whaler consents to go home.
2. He reverses his promise.
3. His wife goes mad.

You will see that the Problem, as it stands is a mere statement of life. It lacks the cohesion that converts story into Conflict. The wife goes mad because the author wills it, not from any tangible reason that a composite crowd can see. If the audience could be emotionalized into experiencing this madness by proxy, then the thing would be a play and not an untheatric episode.

Eugene O'Neill manifests promising skill in this book of playlets and his work affords excellent study for the novitiate both positive and negative. If he will watch this failure to dramatize his spectators, his advent into the big playhouses will be *quicken*ed and his other talents will tend to make

him excel. His genius is ripe with this one exception.

*Boni & Liveright, New York, \$1.35. Published under the title "The Moon of the Caribbees" and six other plays of the sea.

THE INVISIBLE FOE.

With a Dash of Melodrama.

Spiritualism may be utilized in a play so long as the average beliefs of the composite crowd are not exceeded. Nearly everyone believes that there may be some means of communicating with departed souls. In just what way or to what degree these manifestations assert themselves is a ticklish question for the dramatist. A far-fetched instance may invite disaster. It does not appear that Walter Hackett asks us to accept too much. It may be that a single dash of old time melodrama demolishes his splendid structure.

Problem.

1. A man is falsely accused of murder.
2. The spirit discloses the fraud.
3. The innocent victim is freed.

The second clause of this Problem is handled in a way that would not seem to exceed the beliefs of the audience. The spirit of the dead man influences the living to look for certain evidence that will expose the fraud. This situation is full of thrills and the dramatist does not allow us to question its reality. His constructive technic is excellent. He dramatizes so thoroughly that we yield to the proxy experience and merge our identities with the victims of the fraud. What is it then that kills conviction?

In a play requiring such exquisite psychic atmosphere, a streak of rank melodrama has little place.

When the villain hits the threadbare trail of forcing the heroine to marry him he doubtless starts the offshoot of Plot that leads to destruction. The rascal has no Conflict reason for wanting to marry her. He is a relic of antiquity. The disparity disturbs the delicate fabric of our spirit dream and mars the success that the play so nearly deserved. In any event the secret of failure is well worth study where the general technic of a play borders so nearly on perfection.

THE BRIDE SHOP.

An Expanded Tabloid.

The finest feature of "The Bride Shop" is its ability to entertain continuously with the customary integrity of a vaudeville act. Few two-a-day actors expect to get away with anything that does not give value received for every minute of time taken up. It is a sad fact in legitimate drama that such is not the case. Producers and playwrights seem to think they can let lines, scenes and even whole acts go fallow if they make up for it at other intervals. The sooner they get down to a vaudeville veracity, the better it will be for our two-dollar drama.

We seldom write of Musical Plays unless they offer some startling lesson in legitimate drama. This is the lesson to be learned from "The Bride Shop." You may find some of the fun a little old, but always put up in a new and original package. Take the old pants-ripping gag, for instance. Here it is woven into the plot by ripping the cloth to make ribbons for bouquets. This is all that is required to make the obsolete modern. Give it the resurrecting touch of your own applied usage and you give birth to new life dramatically. If the hokum of most plays *re retraced* to its origin few spectators now live

who could recall its nativity. Imagination can create little. It combines old images into new concepts. If your brain is fertile in this trick, rest assured you are a playwright, if you study your audience the divine efflatus will follow.

EXPERIENCE.

The Allegory of Temptations.

This ambitious work by George V. Hobart will probably have a higher rating ten years hence than it earned on its first appearance. It is more of a Morality than a Play being an allegory of the Fates and Passions that beset the average youth on his journey through the allurements of life. There is no Unity save these experiences applied to one young man. Each Episode is a Scene in itself but the ten chapters do not claim any interdependence. In a way it is a sequel to "Everywoman" whose experiences portrayed feminine temptations.

"Experience" will always be a pattern for Moralities of this description but the more tangible value to students is Mr. Hobart's exquisite craft in little instances like the girl's stealing to aid the boy. We can't help wishing he had followed out this little thread of Plot and made a completed play of it. The ten Episodes are filled with little human touches which only the master craftsman can create. Don't fail to see even a road production of "Experience" if you do not already have it in your mental library.

THE RIVALS.*

An Overflow of Rhetoric.

Young Sheridan had such an excess of good language that he wrote and wrote and wrote. His first version of "The Rivals" was twice as long as any *evening could exhibit* and even after careful pruning

the first night brought protests from the press and public. It was of intolerable duration. Had it been fifty pages shorter the same complaint might well apply for his habit of stuffing every character with words, no matter what its age or station, is calculated to exhaust the spectator.

Joseph Jefferson found it necessary to reduce the play to three acts and make other sweeping alterations. Far from sacrilege this is one of the best tributes to Jefferson's dramaturgic genius. The play is utterly unplayable in its full printed form. Schools and Colleges wade through it at the expense of meaning for the majority of their suffering auditors. Only those who have studied the book can get a glimmer of sense out of the muddle. And yet literature has given Sheridan enduring fame as a playwright.

As a printed text the wit and humor, the satirical flights, are worthy of a high place in the library, but to permit the student of playwriting to regard this work as a current model is an unpardonable crime against Dramatology. Yet the school takes little notice of its fallacies. It is the work of a boy, a boy prodigy so far as words are concerned. But his superfluity of words is just as laughable as the Malapropian blunders of his female role. Jefferson was wise to enlarge the part of Bob Acres by shrinking the remainder. But his performance was far more the funny capers he put into it than the verbiage the author let loose. And is it any wonder, Sheridan had hardly seen a show. He wrote because the dictionary was in him. He had an explosion of words. He conceived humorous situations but could not assemble them.

And herein lies the moral. Your eternal fame *'s in the keeping* of literary critics, not in the hands

of those who know. If you are writing for eternity emulate Sheridan and you may live. If your aim is rather to serve some purpose in the age in which you live, build plays like many of our modern masterpieces that may be gone and forgotten in a generation to come. It is a mooted question whether good plays should survive their usefulness. Their human service for a time is the main thing. Plays are not primarily intended for the printed page. If done in print it should be more for the record they make in the progress of playwriting. This eternal yowl about the enduring qualities of a manuscript should bear little weight with the sincere dramatist. His province is here and now. The next generation will doubtless evolve as we have and our sources of delight will in turn become curios, as indeed they should. Do we want the world to stand still just for us?

*Samuel French, New York, 15c.

HICK'RY FARM.*

A Lesson to Amateur Players.

The publishers would probably testify to the popularity of this play for amateur production and its profitable sale as a printed text. It should be a great lesson to beginners. The best actors on earth could do nothing with it. What can the poor amateur hope for? To be sure it has desultory Conflict between Good and Evil, but the clash is so infantile and the method of expression so obsolete that the result could not possibly seem to convey a semblance of reality to the present-day playgoer; no matter how friendly he might be.

To attempt to tell what the play is about would involve at least three distinct stories. The first is *a theft of the deed to the farm*, then a bank robbery,

and finally the plight of the heroine. There is no apparent desire on the part of the author to merge these separate episodes, but the poor amateur is required to hobble through them hashing detached fragments of each. Of course, some of the moments offer isolated Suspense. But this only aggravates matters. The essence of good drama creates a taste for more, and the "Farm" doesn't furnish it. Amateur players should select scripts that offer the best opportunities for the greatest actors, then there is a fighting chance for the home talent troupe.

*Samuel French, New York, 15c.

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THE DRAMATIST

EASTON, PA.

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TENTH YEAR!

The Dramatist

A Journal of Dramatology

LUTHER B. ANTHONY, Editor

Vol. X

EASTON, PA.

No. 4

QUARTERLY

1919

OCTOBER

AT NINE FORTY-FIVE.

The Maximum of Melodrama.

We are going through an age of mystery melodrama and this will probably rank as one of the most perfect specimens of the epoch. Both in technic and entertainment it is a work of wonder and still it relies upon no theme, no current topic; nothing but the sheer force of dramatic Suspense. It does not mislead the audience, like "Under Cover" nor does it by any means make the outcome obvious. There is a subtle preparation for the ultimate discovery but the path is so cleverly covered by deep dismay that the spectator is thoroughly gratified with his evening of technical excitation. The author frankly invites you to such a feast and the banquet overflows.

Problem.

1. A man is mysteriously murdered.
2. Three victims confess vicariously.
3. Inquisition forces out the fact.

The very anatomy of this play smacks of pure technic. Owen Davis has set out to entertain us with old school stuff served in exquisite style. He accomplishes his purpose in every detail. Instead of bringing in the past by narrative process he *compels each morsel of antecedent information to come*

out by valid cause and effect. Nothing is shirked for the author's convenience. At the end of the first act he has things beautifully balled up for the audience. At the end of the second act he completely confounds the police. And in his conclusion he gratifies our expectations which we have instinctively clung to even in the face of dumbfounding facts. As melodrama this play takes first place in the march of perfection.

THE FAITHFUL.*

Dramatizing a Community.

Masefield, with his usual indifference to the dramatic attempts to spread the sympathy of an audience over a whole community of ill treated martyrs and let it pass for a play. To make matters worse, he does not choose a contemporaneous crowd but an ancient Oriental outfit. It is a plight of the past we are supposed to pin our emotions to. We are required to merge ourselves not with an imaginary hero but with a mob and then survive obstacles of strange manners and customs unaccompanied by emotional pulse. This would be a huge task for a great dramatist. It is an impossible feat for a poet of little or no dramatic genius.

Problem.

1. A leader is forced to slay himself.
2. His followers resolve to avenge his death.
3. They die heroically in the act.

The nature of the plot makes it impossible for us to suffer their vicitudes by proxy. An audience cannot identify itself with a group. Few instances fasten the experience on any one person of the play and when they do it is so fantastic that we unpoetic mortals are unable to *Feel* anything like *uman* compassion. We are merely contemplating

a curio. A time may come when a composite crowd can respond to abstract spiritual appeal but that is a long way off. A current play must found its action on fundamental laws, such as Self, Sex or Parentage. The emotions that involve any one of these three will move the multitude. Less tangible emotions tend to sift auditors. If "The Faithful" ever draws a houseful it will be the actor rather than the theatrical substance of the piece. It is not a play.

*The Macmillan Company, N. Y., \$1.25.

ADAM AND EVA.

A Dialog Masterpiece.

The highest merit of this play is its excellence of Dialog. It is seldom that we get such rapid fire wit and humor, such well rounded retort and responsiveness from any but veteran playwrights. "Adam and Eva" is almost a masterpiece in this respect. In fact its success is not dependent upon its merit so much as the capacity of New York for auditors up to the level of such artistic endeavor. The song is there if there are ears to hear it.

Problem.

1. A manager takes charge of a family.
2. He feigns bankruptcy to check extravagance.
3. They betray latent talents for self support.

The play could be riddled with constructive analysis but the very key of its make-believe pitch disarms any serious criticism. The business manager is not well characterized; no evidence of his ability being introduced. The old, old story of regeneration through effort, is all that the new play offers. It is "The Fortune Hunter" plus "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," and a dozen later imitations, all done over again. But it has a something that none of *these plays* could boast of. Is it the never failing

operation of give-and-take responsiveness in the Dialog? If a play can subsist on this one ingredient "Adam and Eva" will survive the test.

There are instances of clever technic, to be sure, which balance off the bits of negative structure. The scheme for feigning bankruptcy is hatched before our eyes. This is commendable. The authors face their plot needs with proper courage and usually accomplish the apparent impossible in a workmanlike manner. Their work would not compare with a past master like Owen Davis, but it is many times better than a specimen like "The Gibson Upright" analyzed in this issue. *The Dramatist* expects great things of Messrs. Bolton and Middleton. The present product gives promise. Study technic, gentlemen. Attain the same facility of Scene building that qualifies your faculty for Dialog and the game will be won.

MOONLIGHT AND HONEYSUCKLE.

Apocryphal Adultery.

George Scarborough has invented a new situation in drama at the expense of Composite ideals. His innovation is the greatest detriment against his play. A girl of twenty deliberately fibs about her chastity. This is pardonable when the guilty feigns innocence but for a virgin to pretend impurity is quite another thing. And her only purpose is to disenchant a pair of suitors. Is any audience callous enough to resist such revulsion? A lie is seldom safe on the lips of a heroine. But a lie that pollutes a pure woman is beyond the management of a master. Shaw would scarcely attempt it. It tends to shatter the very ideals which the drama fosters. All playwriting is the pitting of virtue against vice. — When virtue besmirches herself the glamor of *ma* vanishes.

THUNDER.**Can Atmosphere Be Dramatised?**

The danger in fashioning one play after another is well demonstrated in this instance. "Thunder" was evidently put on to capture the prestige of "Lightnin," a current success. It teems with atmosphere and local color but has no sustained picture in the foreground. There is just as big an opportunity for character creation as in "Lightnin" but no adequate Conflict to mold it in.

Problem.

1. A preacher commits purgery.
2. A showman exposes him.
3. It doesn't matter.

The play is as flimsy as this Problem. There is no definite line of action. The motives for purgery are as weak as the motive for exposure and neither moves us much for the Conflict does not enlist our sympathies. There are several other half-developed plots but they remain episodes owing to their detached nature. All of which can best be illustrated by a reconstructed Problem designed to knit the parts into a concrete whole.

Revised Problem.

1. A preacher commits purgery.
2. He is exposed.
3. He escapes by matrimony.

It is necessary to elucidate to make this Problem explanatory. The preacher lies for an altruistic purpose. He wants the heroine to inherit a fortune so that she can found a school. He is caught in the act but a solution dawns upon him. The girl is in love with a rustic youth. He turns out to be the rightful heir to the miser's fortune. The preacher calmly *unites the two* and acquits himself of the crime. This

is Jersey Justice but it is consistent with the quaint tone of the play. The letter of the law is all that the sheriff stands for.

This trifling turn is the magic stroke which makes failure a success over and over again. If properly dramatized some such solarplexus punch would put pep in the leading part and possibly create the one-role character intended by the producers. It might turn flat failure into triumph. At any rate, it is a good exercise in play building. If your play crisis hangs on such a hair try to find the blade to cut it. The answer is ever at your elbow. Never give up till you have evolved it out of the inherent elements in your play.

THE BETTER 'OLE.

Happy-go-lucky Humor.

Strike out the humor founded upon the sympathy for the soldier and you kill most of the appeal of this piece. Strike out the cockney accent and kill the comedy. The happy-go-lucky spirit of the trenches sustains the interest for the most part. The abstract Suspense of the German Blue Paper which Old Bill nonchalantly carries around is very slow fire. It does not assume the proportions of a plot till late in the play.

Problem.

1. A private blows up a bridge.
2. He is about to be shot.
3. They award him a medal.

There is the nucleus of a rattling good military farce in this Problem but "The Better 'Ole" does not make much of it. The venture is strictly an amateur attempt and the producers may have done well to retain rather than retard the free-for-all fun *f the thing*. The success of the piece seems to

back up this conclusion. If an entertainment is not drama it usually relies on one good acting part. Old Bill dominates throughout in "The Better 'Ole" and we are all so saturated with satisfaction that the battle is won. It is one of those instances where a world war is needed to provide popular appeal. Patriotic prejudice is not employed, but military fervor plays an important part. The piece is a product of the war.

THE GIBSON UPRIGHT.*

Bolshevism in America.

The authors show discernment in printing rather than producing this play. It makes good reading. In the library we do not mind the suefeit of words nor do we miss the happenings. In the theatre we would do both heartily. Most of the Second Act is given over to second-hand narrated reports of what has happened elsewhere. Nothing is here and now, nothing is actually *Seen* of Plot. But the play idea is excellent and its publication may give some more skilful playwright a clever tip for dramatization.

Problem.

1. A factory owner abdicates.
2. His employees run rampant.
3. They welcome his return.

Here is the scaffolding for a real play. The subject is current and the dramatic possibilities are great if theatrical methods are utilized. Booth Tarkington and Harry Leon Wilson are recognized authors. They have rattled off this Problem rather recklessly. Even as narrative its inherent satire is not developed. They dash off the Dialog in true amateur style. They erect no obstacles and *encounter none*. Everything issues in their favor

whether motives permit or no. The authors do not take their task seriously. Neither do they take it humorously enough. They seem to feel that it is not worth doing as a play and that any old thing is good enough for print.

By all means procure the book and study its shortcomings. Take the narrative synopsis and strip it of verbiage, then build a Scenario in Sequence of visible events. Let each step in construction be seen—not heard. Then when you See the whole as a silent drama before you, stick in the Dialog. It will be an excellent exercise

*Doubleday Page & Co., Garden City, N. Y., \$1.25.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.*

Imported American Martyrdom.

It is a strange freak indeed that an Englishman writes an American martyr into the drama. Mr. John Drinkwater has done this in a most flattering manner so far as the reflex compliment to the Yankee is concerned but the joke of it is that he wrote a success for British consumption. Whether the play will succeed at home, that is, the home of the hero, depends largely upon the actor playing the name part. Many London triumphs fail here but the unheard of element in this venture is the imported praise of our martyred president.

Problem.

1. A rube is made president.
2. He ignores experienced politicians.
3. His policies win.

This is a thin Problem but it gives all the plot that "Abraham Lincoln" contains. There is more biography than play. The author relies on Character rather than Conflict. Neither does he utilize *Conflict* to mold his character in. He assumes pro-

phetic vision which after history corroborates. He dips his pen in the fountain of martyrdom and sketches the strife of that period. His theme is war from an ethical point of view. This contingent interest gives the past a popular appeal. But as we have already said the Lincoln role will determine the life of the play on this side of the water. There are wonderful traits and moments for the right player.

*Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, \$1.25.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.*

An Autobiography of Ideals.

One way to tune up your ideals of true manhood is to study the life of an ideal American. We have had no loftier example than Theodore Roosevelt.* His autobiography is dramatic because it is so chock full of *Doing*. It teems with Conflict, humorous episode and lofty principle and it is all told with supreme relish. The ripeness of this great man's wisdom and the breadth of his philosophy make a library of study for the young dramatist.

For a good Scene of personal encounter try page 136. Pages 625-6 give a marvelous example of self-restraint. One of his police court stories on page 215 would make a good skit and his cowboy experiences are crammed with pioneer comedy. See particularly his encounter with a rough-neck on page 136. If you do not feel like buying this book it can doubtless be found in your public library. But we heartily recommend it as a permanent acquisition. It will enlarge your vision of wholesome citizenship and inspire you with broad ideals of right and wrong. It is more virile than a dozen dramas. It is a thesaurus of positive Character.

**The Macmillan Company, N. Y., \$3.00.*

CANDID CRITICISM.**A Result of the War.**

One of the incidental triumphs of the world war is the advent of real criticism in New York City. A prominent critic who served his term as war correspondent comes back to his paper with regenerate pep. A few such candid critics would make *The DRAMATIST* a non-essential theatric censor. Glance at these exerps from *The New York Times*:

A REGULAR FELLER.

The story, set against a background of the automobile tire business, proceeds through the four acts wheezily, and not infrequently it stops altogether, panting for breath. Unfortunately, exhaustion is not due to the fact that Mr. Swan has driven his plot too rapidly, but that he has given it so little exercise as to produce an unhealthy condition. On these occasions the hand of the playwright can plainly be seen, feeding it oxygen.

The result of this treatment, of course, is a jerky, patch-work, artificial play—a work which is at its best when it dispenses with plot altogether, and goes in for the by-products. By far the best scenes of the play are those in which James Bradbury, as a rural commissioner of roads, adventures with a broken-down automobile. There was in the dilapidated car a ready analogy to the entertainment of the evening. At times it ran under its own power, but finally it became necessary to affix a horse to it.

NIGHTIE NIGHT.

Disguised under the somewhat indecorous and quite misleading title of "Nightie Night," an old-time farce arrived in town last evening, where it was greeted at the Princess with several hours of *tinuous and unforced laughter*. It begins boldly

with a quite brazenly impossible situation, keeps going at a furious rate by dint of many doors and lies, and stops at 11 o'clock because it is time for the audience to go home. It is made of materials that have been used so often in the last twenty-five years that they are worn through in spots. And yet it is funny. It would be difficult (and quite unnecessary) to tell why it is funny. It just is.

A trifle more space than was employed to print the Peace Treaty in this newspaper would be needed to give a coherent and detailed account of the plot of "Nightie Night," which deals roughly, very roughly, with an innocent young husband's embarrassed efforts to seem innocent when his jealous wife discovers his former inamorata wandering about their apartment in negligee. Of course, she had sublet the place without knowing it was his, and of course she had sent out her dress to the cleaner's and of course the cleaner's was immediately closed because it was Yom Kippur. So she is in the stationary washtub—a pleasing variant of the screen motif—and everybody came to the kitchen to spend the morning, and so on and so on.

FIRST IS LAST.

If it were not for a still vivid memory of "The Red Dawn," it would be possible to describe the new comedy which arrived last night at the Maxine Elliott Theatre as the most awkward, tedious, and generally preposterous play of the season. It is called "First is Last" and is credited on the program to Samuel Shipman and Percival Wilde, the former an industrious playwright, partially responsible for several of the conspicuous popular successes of the *past year*.

The new piece unfolds a pattern which becomes quite hopelessly familiar long before the first act has come to a close. It follows the adventures of five Columbia students and four Barnard girls, who, on the night of Commencement, agree to pool all their future successes and failures and divide three years later, according to a scale fixed by their presumptive earning capacities. A long retrospect of our dear old college plays, even back to the joyous days of "The College Widow," fails to recall any quite so incredible as this one.

JUDITH.*

Another Novelist's Plaything.

Why does Arnold Bennett persist in making a plaything of the drama. He would not attempt to foist such feeble effort upon the fiction public. Does he dream that his gentle dabbling in the dramatic renders it palatable in play form? The entire fable depends upon credulity in miracles and oracles. It would be difficult to summon a free audience to swallow them.

Problem.

1. Judea is deprived of water.
2. Judith slays the offender.
3. Her city is saved.

There is nothing new or vital in the story to give it dramatic entity. Even if the scriptural story were literally true this would not give it title to theatric respect. The human element must be dramatized. There must be an experience which some character goes through that is susceptible of being shared by us. Compared with plays like "The Wanderer" which employs fundamental life principle, "Judith" is a callow lass.

Geo. H. Doran Company, N. Y., \$1.00.

DRAMATOLOGY

A Complete Course in Play Construction in Ten Analytic and Synthetic Steps, Including Nearly 100 Plays Analyzed for the Student.

BY LUTHER B. ANTHONY

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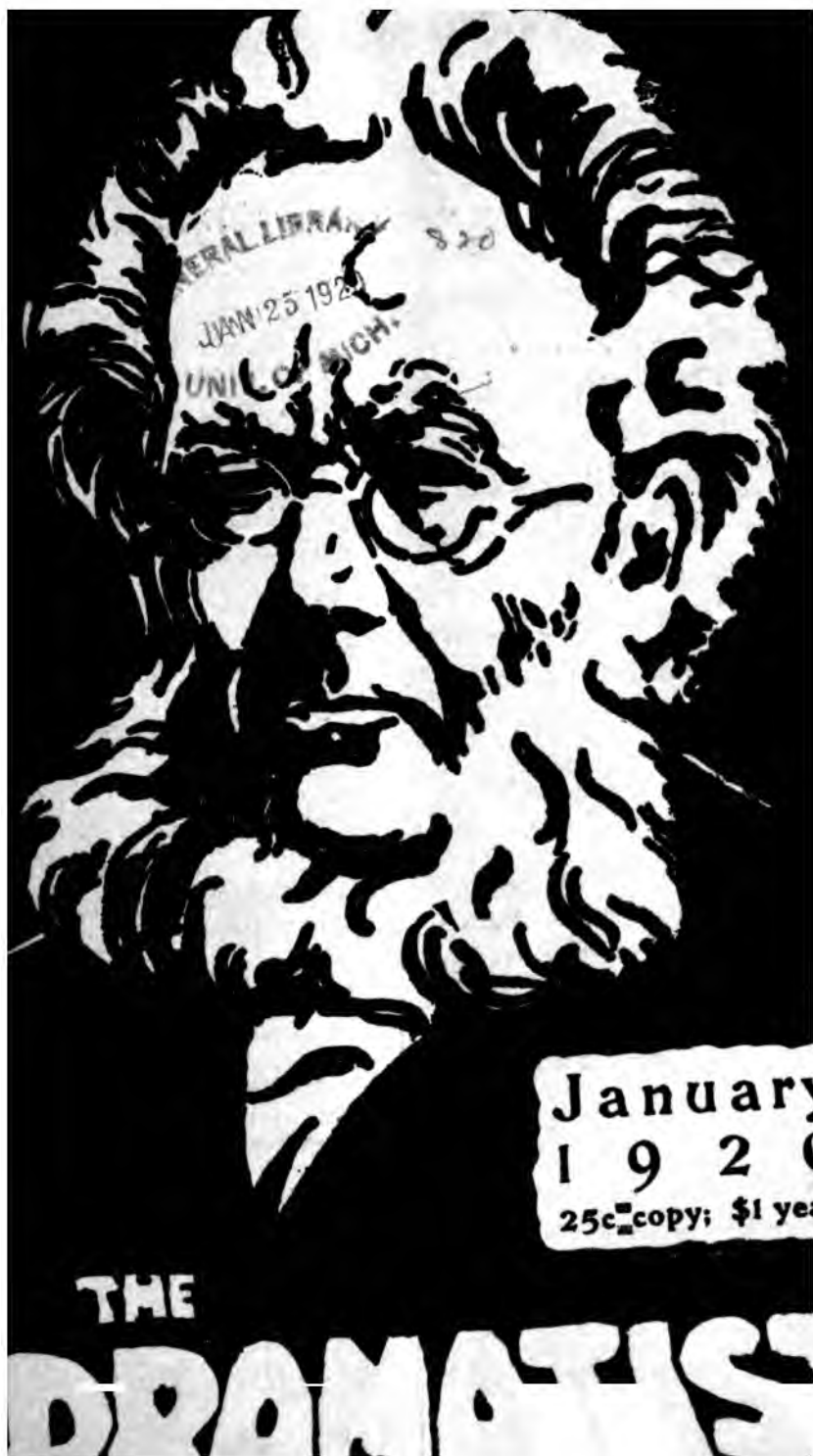
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QUARTERLY

1920

JANUARY

PIETRO.

A Mawkish Melodramatic Muddle.

Allow an actor to pick his own play and he is prone to let individual opportunity run away with him. It is no reflection on the player for at best he should be good and pliable putty in the dramaturgic mold. The great playwrights have usually been poor players. And so runs the paradox. In this instance Otis Skinner outrages the fundamental emotion involved merely to gratify his actor's ego in portraying abstract moods, pictures and passions. These are robbed of their response by reason of the desecrated laws of life beneath them. An analysis of the story would shock the inherent instincts of the lowest human species.

Problem.

1. A daughter idealizes her dead mother.
2. The mother turns up a strumpet.
3. She blackmails the husband.

If this Problem were visible to the naked eye, Mr. Skinner would not touch it with a ten-foot pole. Of course there are other ingredients in this Plot but the whole is so rambling and inchoate that no true Problem prevails. A Prolog tells of a husband tried for the murder of a wife who was jealous of his affec-

tion for their infant daughter. He rears his child in abject idealization of this deceased wretch and she shows up in an effort to blackmail funds from him to preserve her illicit lover from imprisonment. The daughter despises her and her own matrimonial prospects are wrecked.

Into this mawkish perversion of mother-love the actor endeavors to inject himself as a revered father who amasses millions and shields his daughter from the past. In other words, Otis Skinner is required to win our sympathy for himself and daughter against the needless prostitution of a mother degraded by her jealousy of her own child. But this atrocity was not the original intent of the authors, no doubt. In endless revision this canker probably crept in. Even Jules Eckert Goodman muffed it in collaborating with Mrs. Skinner.

The play is a thriving example of the evil of seeking simply situations and acting roles. It relegates every vestige of characterization and consistency to gain this superficial semblance of Italian dialect. In reality Peter is no type at all, he is but a fumbling bit of mummery devoid of all the instincts that good souls hold and cherish. He martyrizs himself at the expense of the mother and indirectly the daughter. For we are obliged to behold the hate of a girl for her own mother whom she has been taught to idolize.

THE WOMAN OF BRONZE.

A Two-Problem Play.

There are two Problems contending for supremacy in this play, one psychological and the other theatrical. These result in a rather vague, disturbed meaning for the audience. The first concerns the hero's ideals or inspirations and the second his *animal* perquisites. The one is for the newspapers

the other for the playgoing public. It might be better to confine the Conflict to one thing or the other. It is either highbrow or showbrow. It cannot be both. The two do not mix. For an eminent actress like Miss Anglin it is well to have something esthetic but will her public want to **FEEL** or **THINK** the play. Here are the two Problems.

Problem No. 1.

1. An artist lacks inspiration.
2. He crushes his wife's spirit.
3. She becomes the model of misery.

Problem No. 2.

1. A husband has a mistress.
2. The wife decides to slay her.
3. Her pregnancy prevents.

As the play now stands a third act of the first Problem follows a second act of the second Problem in a rather disjointed fashion. The two could be merged if the **MIND** action and the **HEART** action were carried side by side. But the second Problem becomes detached from the first in Act III and the authors **TALK** us into a denouement which has little or nothing to do with the stabbing affray of Act II. If the first problem were isolated and clearly presented it might make one of the best thesis plays of its time. But as an appendage to a morose melodrama it wields little power.

On the other hand the melodrama gives Miss Anglin the great cataclysm of emotion which her talents can interpret. The psychological offshoot offers her very little. The play on the whole is richer in materials than in the fabrication of these resources. The technic is uneven and patchy but there are *big possibilities* pushing behind it. It is a *splendid study of unimproved property*:

THE CRITICAL MOMENT.**Poor Play Well Ended.**

It is not often that a mediocre piece of workmanship enjoys the distinction of being well finished. This applies only to the denouement, however. A poor Plot is nicely solved. The entire evening is taken up with one woman worrying about the fate of another. Of course, the one woman is Henrietta Crosman, since she is starred in the piece, and the Conflict concerns her efforts to preserve the younger woman from a marital predicament. As in most plays of this character the preserving is a long-drawn out affair, designed rather to afford Miss Crosman a bit of blarney than to place the young woman's honor in actual jeopardy. Hence the dramatic weakness of Plot.

To efface this frailty the authors naively put Miss Crosman in a fly and spider predicament in the hope of enhancing the Suspense of the play. This offers further opportunity for the gifted player's glib tongue but stirs up very little emotional excitement for her safety. A girl of sixty summers is not a target for scandal and the audience will not react seriously at any threats to defile her chastity. The effort to augment by this means runs random. The experiment shows the difficulties that beset the path of young authors trying to write roles for experienced stars. This analysis is made from trial performances but the criticisms will hold good unless the entire piece is rehabilitated.

CURIOSITY.**A Sex Passion Conflict.
Problem.**

1. A husband defends his infidelity.
2. His wife tampers with temptation.
She supports his contention.

In this play, not only the treatment but the theme has an immoral tendency and intent. When the author's intention is avowedly evil there is little left to debate. According to our best standards of conduct it is not morally right to endorse infidelity in the male sex nor to portray passion merely for the purpose of tantalizing the sensuality of an audience. Add to this an inartistic portrayal of these vices and you have a rather studidly bad comedy. To openly toy with passion is not good etiquette. To do so skillfully entices a certain element to the box office. But to descend to this level and fail to make the lascivious fascinating is a taint of indescency.

So much for the Moral of the play. In other technical parts the work has merit. There is ample Dialog of more than usual quality and the intrigue is fairly good. Plausibility is weak as are all Conflicts where the husband and wife are living together in marital remoteness. Such subjects require exquisite handling. A Shaw might get away with it, but he would doubtless render the whole theme in satire. Isben might make it a blow at current conventions. But Mr. Adams has not lifted it out of the fetid froth of iniquity. Ask yourself, Mr. Adams, what was your intent? This invariably molds the Moral of your play.

THE LUST OF GOLD.

Delirium Tremens Melodrama.

Lou Tellegen is the apostle of histrionic gloom. He gave us a glimpse of this attribute in "Blind Youth"* but in this new try-out the whole story is drenched with despondency. Both as playwright and player Mr. Tellegen strikes a stolid, impassive pose and holds the attitude throughout the enter-prize. This is evidently a foreigner's notion of

entertainment. It does not fit the American audience save that portion of us which is prehypnotized by his reputation acquired in the movies.

Problem.

1. A vampire seduces a farmer.
2. Her husband appropriates his property.
3. She loses husband and dupe.

This apparently is not the plot Mr. Tellegen originally intended. Problems have a way of changing their forms in course of rehearsal. At this writing "The Lust of Gold" is wandering about the woods doing a land-office business but groping helplessly for a central idea. It has neither beginning nor end and the middle is hardly worth two well built extremities. The characters do not know their own wishes hence the audience is forever at sea concerning motivation. In other words the hero goes stalking about the stage to no coherent purpose, the vampire vamps away to no coherent end, the husband countenances her adultery but resents her duplicity and so contradictions weave an open mesh that anyone may read a shapeless meaning into. For the composite crowd the play has about as much significance as a shooting star.

*See page 874, Vol. IX, No. 2.

FORBIDDEN.

An Armistice Play.

No matter how well written, a play stands little chance of surviving two confirmed prejudices; military plots and alien admiration. Managerial dictum is pretty well set against these topics and the fate of this play will determine its wisdom. Be that as it may the play is a splendid bit of construction and is *a high tribute* to the pen of Dorothy Donnelly. Few *layers* can write as good drama.

Problem.

1. A Yank is betrothed to a German girl.
2. She learns he shot her brother.
3. The marriage is put off.

Nearly every law of technic is observed in this play. The audience is dramatized, the author is hidden in the motives of her characters. Dialog is well painted and the story is a Conflict, not a narrative. Unity wanders little if any from the germ of Plot purpose and the mechanism of Scene structure is carefully knit. Effects are well graded and the Moral is imbedded in the plot. Miss Donnelly has every reason to be proud of her work even if she has missed the playgoers' goal in the timeliness of her topic. Her entertainment qualities are very high in this production and the naturalness of her dough-boys surpasses anything we have seen from the otherside.

BOYS WILL BE BOYS.**Deferred First Childhood.**

The chief ingredient of interest in this composition is the deferred childhood of a boy who gains the wherewith to indulge his infant longings at the belated age of sixty. This Irvin Bobb story is prepared for the stage by Charles O'Brien Kennedy without much regard for the technic that is supposed to make such performances negotiable with a composite crowd. To be sure the story is told by means of characters but it is not passed through that process which renders the storyteller's tale a succession of events so sequenced as to sustain the interest of an average audience. There are always a few who will do their dramatizing and for them the play is a pippin. *But for the many who are not given to self hypnosis the incidents of Plot become a meaning-*

less hodgepodge of simple minded pranks. To them the clever outline of character drawing is merely a degenerate stable boy and the structure a crude specimen of amateur playwriting. Many plays contain these same frailties but it is the business of the playwright to conceal them. He must so engross you with the pull of plot that the absurdities and improbabilities do not dispel your dream. In this case it should have been the sympathy for old Peep. There are touches of genuine appeal in "Boys Will Be Boys" but these are not knit into one fabric and the yarn is frail. The one big thought is the avowed intent of portraying this belated boyhood in a simple soul of threescore years. This is new stuff and deserves better treatment.

ON THE HIRING LINE.

A Detective Parody.

Harvey O'Higgins and Harriet Ford have not let down in their high quality of entertainment. "The Hiring Line" is brim full of professional ammunition fairly well fired. It starts in with the intention of ridiculing the help question but turns out a detective parody. Incidentally it is one of the best satires on the employer ever written.

Problem.

1. A man hires detectives for servants.
2. They disgrace their profession.
3. They remain as domestics.

The Problem shows which way the wind blows. The farce leans more toward sleuths than servants and the fun is largely evoked from the former. The merit of the play centres in its Dialog which surpasses its situations for laughter. Its lines are better than most of the travesties which meet with a *ster degree of financial success.* In fact, the best

lesson to be obtained for the tyro is the sustained Dialog brilliancy. You may study this attribute with profit.

39 EAST.

Dramatized Innocence.

In these days of artifice and sophistication it is harder to find an author who can successfully portray unadulterated girlish innocence than almost any other attribute. New authors soon become so accustomed to what passes on the stage for virtue and the average love scene is reeled off with no more sincerity than a musical show. Diamonds and sables are symbols of chastity in the sentiment of most workshops. Miss Crothers draws a picture of real purity as the victim of gossip and suspicion in "39 East". Penelope Penn projects a faithful stage semblance of unsophistication. There are moments when she seems almost too callow, but if the audience swallows it, that is the only test.

Problem.

1. A girl rejects a true suitor.
2. She accepts favors of a sensualist.
3. The suitor saves her.

If Rachel Crothers were the adept at structure that she is in Dialog and Characterization, she would be nearly one hundred per cent. playwright. The second premise of her Problem is entirely omitted. That is, the play omits any visualizations of it. We HEAR of the supper with the sensualist but we SEE nothing of him. He does not enter into the picture. It is a dangerous omission. The Conflict agencies should appear. All of the plot principals should *come on* to avoid the monotony of words and the

density of meaning. To carry one of them through an entire performance by means of sound is a precarious proposition. Sight is a much safer channel of dramatization. No matter how beautifully the part is TOLD it is more potent when played. Drama is DOING!

UP IN MABEL'S ROOM.

An Underwear Event.

If you do not mind three acts of undermuslins at the present market price Mabel's room will prove a funny little bedchamber. You can laugh out loud with no fear of reproof from the good souls who assemble nightly to get a glimpse of Mabel's nether negligee. And the only evil you will see in the young widow's intimate habiliments is the bad you bring with you rather than any bad that belongs.

Problem.

1. A husband once gave a girl some knickers.
2. He later tries to retrieve them.
3. It makes a lot of undressed hilarity.

Of course there are those who will not visit this entertainment for its innocent display of envelope underwear but will insist upon symbolizing some ulterior association. For them the play would not be wholesome. And it is just possible the authors had this class in mind as a box-office increment. To willfully flaunt a sex suggestion in the faces of those who are unable to resist is an act of immoral tendency. If this were ostensibly the purpose of the play its moral would be degrading. But this all depends upon interpretation and who can estimate the average morals of a composite crowd. The play uses all innocent and superficial souls.

THE MIRACLE MAN.**Where the Film Surpasses.**

The fact that this quality of story can enthrall a movie audience is a very strong argument in favor of the film. Like its theme, the public cannot resist anything artistically and intrinsically TRUE. The theme that good begets good and that faith begets faith is a verity that no mortal can challenge. And it is a salutary sign when patrons fed on tawdry plots and frothy sentimentality can voluntarily visit a photoplay like "The Miracle Man".

Problem.

1. Crooks exploit a faithhealer.
2. He trusts them.
3. They reform.

This subject is far better suited to the film than the living stage. The continual change of hill and dale supports the flimsy texture of the miracle element. The beauty of photography lends stability of its lean reliance on fact. Those who are skeptical of faith healing gain considerable credence from the actuality of nature pictured in convincing events.

The picture preaches a sermon that no pulpit can surpass. The habit of bad needs only to be replaced by the habit of good. Crime and chastity are merely habits of the soul. If we are compelled to FEEL either continuously we will mold our characters in consequence. But the most voluntary feeling of mankind is righteousness and to be swept by the whirlwind we have only to get in its gale.

CIVILIAN CLOTHES.**Pronounced Personality.**

When you go to the theatre persuaded through current criticism that a play is poor and then come away shouting with ecstasy, it's a safe bet the

author's technique is sound and his product highly entertaining. For this is indeed the art gratifying an audience. It is the aim of technique we are all after. So all hail Thompson Buchanan! He has had his ups and downs but this time he goes over the top with a brilliant success.

Problems.

- 1. A captain is made in civilian clothes.
- 2. He becomes bitter for his wife's sake.
- 3. His true personality dominates.

From the start this comedy is not for fun, and it gets there. And while we are missing a keen satire on snobbery the playwright is touching out a substantial stage philosophy. For good scene structure, sound Problems, telling dialog and pronounced personality Mr. Buchanan has written the best idea drama of the post bellum series. Ask yourself after seeing this performance if it does not somehow give you a fuller satisfaction as the entry of a play than one out of ten of the things you witness.

ADMIRABLE CRICHTON (FILMED).*

Barrie's Masterpiece Dismembered.

Just as "The Miracle Man" is elevated by the movie so is Barrie's Masterpiece carelessly shattered in the film—"Male & Female". The satire, wit and subtleties of the original are all sacrificed for the silliest substitutes of photographic detail. The producers condescend to improve on Barrie till the screen version sinks into travesty. This is not alone the analytical estimate. The best summing up of the picture is two lines of comment overheard on our exit from the theatre.

1st Auditor: Something wrong with that.

2nd Auditor: Something's wrong's right.

*See page 623 for Stage Criticism.

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by George Creel

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ONATIST

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†The dagger indicates that the play is being tried out on the road. The title may change before reaching New York City.

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QUARTERLY

1920

APRIL

THE SON-DAUGHTER.

Exquisite Melodrama.

Again Mr. Belasco is able to exceed your wildest wishes of reality by taking a group of Chinamen almost alien to our sympathies and simply saturating us with satisfactory Suspense. Of course, his is the acme of stagecraft plus playcraft. The cleverest contribution he makes to Mr. Scarborough's script is not what he puts on paper but what he makes with paint.

Again the old theory is refuted that probabilities have any permanent place in a well constructed play. The childish credulity with which you accept the logical absurdities of this masterplay repeats the proof that emotional appeal is not in the realm of reasoning judgment. For here is a play with every handicap of foreign tongue, costume and custom, that seats itself in the subconscious and makes as deep an impression as the most logically demonstrated theorem. It explodes all those venerable platitudes about the preposterous that academic writers are prone to patter about. It argues that technic is the enduring code in playwriting after all fads and fallacies have run their course.

Problem.

1. A girl sells herself for her country.
2. The buyer betrays his bargain.
3. She strangles him.

All plays that hold a sustained grip on the audience take their genesis in a simple straightforward hypothesis something like the foregoing. What could be simpler and more concise than this statement of fundamental cause and effect. The Recoil is adequate and the emotional law involved dominates the drama from beginning to end. There are no side paths from the central purpose. The shot goes straight to the target. Add to this the cunning conspiracy of Sequence and Suspense and the poor auditor helplessly submits to the relentless spell in which he is woven. And even this is not all. Every conscious effort that might resist the spell or wake the dream that these magicians have conjured is lulled. The anæsthetic is deadly.

Place "The Son-Daughter" at the top of your list of Unity models. It is also an excellent study of foreign type treatment. It bears out the principles that we have been preaching all these years and we trust that in some remote degree this wonderful workmanship is the indirect result of our technical teachings.

MRS. JIMMIE THOMPSON.

Fine Old-fashioned Farce.

It is hard to believe that the mechanics of expectation can be so well operated without a certainty of success, but New York is a hard market to reckon with. It generally demands mechanics plus. The plus is usually sensation or novelty. And this very good old-fashioned farce may pay the penalty for not containing the requisite increment.

Problem.

1. A girl feigns matrimony.
2. Her faltering suitor falls for it.
3. She feigns divorce to marry him.

The consistent part about this play is that the only act that drags is the one that is not essential to the Problem as above outlined. All that transpires in the first act could easily be omitted or knit into the second and the two scenes of the third might very properly become the second and third acts of the readjusted Conflict. Nothing is accomplished in the first act but a long drawn out delineation of the girl's inability to catch a beau. The Problem does not call for this. And furthermore she shows symptoms of organic decline. No audience wants an anaemic heroine.

But the main defect is that the entire first act is not called for in the author's valid plans and specifications. It is not necessary, as the movies think, to show how this girl hatches a scheme to feign marriage. The action starts with her feigning. And the play rightly starts there etching in the fragments of the past as it goes along. A good play nips the crisis of a story and crystallizes it. It does not dig into the precedent occurrences. The audience wants only the conflict that circumscribes the crisis.

MAN AND WOMAN.**An Unborn Plot.**

That many plays go into rehearsal with little or no technic is born out by the break-in performances of this new product. Managers do not hold out for good structure so long as atmosphere and novelty look good to them. This play has both these incidental *ingredients* but so far it has taken on none of

the fundamentals that comprise a drama. Just what the director will be able to infuse during rehearsals remains to be seen.

Problem.

1. A wife enchants her husband's captor.
2. Her coquetry turns to love.
3. The husband dies of semi-strangulation.

In stead of winning sympathy, this plot contains every known element calculated to disenchant an audience. The brute captor half strangles the helpless cripple. The wife instinctively urges him on. The death of the cripple leaves us with no glory in the triumph of love even in its most primitive interpretation. And the pretty heroine has been so equivocal, so vacillating and contradictory that the ending seems more accidental than dramatic. But with it all the play is well worth careful reconstruction by some giant of logic and unity.

HE AND SHE.*

An Unreal Play.

The weakest feature of this play is the unreality of the two principals. They are so far from the paths of the average playgoer that little sympathy can be stirred for them. Their feelings are not OUR feelings and their impulses are not yours and mine. The effort to write of higher life has lifted the drama over the hearts and heads of plain play-going people. The one big moment is merely a might-have-been tragedy and is not dramatized to keen advantage.

Problem.

1. A mother enters the field of art.
2. Her daughter is almost seduced.
3. *The mother resumes parental duty.*

A play of propaganda should first of all be a play. The big moment mentioned above is the second clause of Problem. The daughter is almost seduced. And even this **ALMOST** is not drawn dramatically tense. The curtains drop in the wrong place and the play is over before the second act ends. If the daughter's seduction were actual, the Problem would have more of a kick. But even then it is doubtful whether the anti-suffrage propaganda could be properly launched in such a Conflict. The real Moral is parental neglect, not professional emancipation of women.

*The Century Co., New York, \$3.50, in a volume entitled "Representative American Plays," which includes 24 other invaluable manuscripts.

THE UNWANTED ONE.

An Act Omitted.

It would be interesting to know whether an intermediate act had been dropped from the original outline of this play. Between Acts one and two the hero disintegrates for no tangible cause. And this is particularly inappropriate for a play that takes its genesis in the said hero's regeneration. The foundation of sympathy is nicely laid for a boy who is renounced by his family for sticking to the little Chinese wife who reclaimed him. The curtain of the first act rings down on this and the second plunges us into baffling conjugal discord. A vampire has interceded! Without rhyme or reason the hero has fallen victim to her wiles. In addition to the blunt abruptness of this change, the vampire is somewhat foreign to the Conflict and it is doubtful *whether a clear design would admit of her entry.*

Problem.

1. A man's family disowns his Chinese wife.
2. His wealthy grandmother adores her.
3. The rest are reconciled by force of finance.

There is no call in this Conflict for a vampire who wheedles the hero away from his wife through the lure of wealth. The two conflicting themes do not properly merge. The abrupt transitions from one strand of story to the other bewilder the audience and mar the single impression sought. There are some big timbers in the building materials, but several false supports maintain them. The satire of the play follows one branch of thought and the heart appeal another. It will be too bad if the manuscript cannot go through a thorough fusing process before it gets to Broadway, for the idea is interesting.

STAND FROM UNDER.**Nothing To Do With Drink.**

This title does not hint nor does the Plot squelch prohibition; as was, manifestly, the intent of the author. The play is a detached collection of virile scenes which do not contribute to any definite end. The author's purpose is to show that stringent laws have vainly existed against drugs and that prohibition will therefore be futile. His remedy is to remove the temptation, not the source. Whether this lesson carries with the crowd may be seen in a glimpse at the fundamentals of Problem.

Problem.

1. A dope addict is a prohibitionist.
2. His wife discovers his depravity.
3. He commits suicide.

Is his suicide a result of legislation against drugs?
Does his death demonstrate the futility of prohibi-

tion? Or is it rather a strong argument in favor of such legislation? The moral designed by the author will not carry with the crowd even though it may sop with the saloonkeeper who goes to the theatre predisposed to enjoy anything at the expense of the opposition.

The higher qualities of this play are not essential to a drug or drink plot. Does anyone want to see dope dragged into the theatre? The real Conflict is a contest for the woman's affections. If the ugly opiates were omitted the love story might make a masterpiece. There is a dignity and manliness about the rival lovers which makes us regret that the Plot employs the pernicious poppy. William Anthony McGuire has advanced centuries in technic since that earlier product, "The Divorce Question."

CORNERED.

Clever Duel Role.

The "split reel" method of playing one woman as two is made practicable for the stage in this new melodrama by Dodson L. Mitchell. In a clever set of contrived situations he outmaneuvers the movies. But in his enthusiasm over the dual role device he overlooks several technical requisites.

Problem.

1. A thief masquerades as an heiress.
2. The latter's rejected lover woes her.
3. The two girls turn out twins.

In the execution of this Problem, the noticeable negatives are: the suitor's flat flop from one girl to the next, the dissipation of a throbbing Suspense, and the spontaneity of the finish. When the suitor becomes enamored of his sweetheart's double, with the *wounded original* present, he should not declare

himself quite so abruptly. This is too crude. There is an excellent opportunity for this love to assert itself when the thief is being persecuted. His protection would signify his love.

The greatest moment of Suspense in the play rests upon the confused identity of the two girls. We in the audience know that a tell-tale ring on the heiress' finger will disclose the truth. This expectation is well planted and has been germinating from the start. The audience cherishes it. It is their superior knowledge. This thrill is dissipated by a flash in the pan. It should be nursed and animated into an enormous punch.

Then the final curtain (of course these remarks are based on a road tryout and may not apply when the play reaches Broadway) fizzles out. There is no crack to the whip. When the waif is proven to be a girl of good birth, the play should come to a spontaneous close. The materials are all there; it is merely their manipulation that needs mending. The twin medals, the fact that the two girls are sisters, the realization that this thief is eligible to marry this wonderful man; the Sequence of these items should so crowd the ending that the sentimental theme might triumph.

WEDDING BELLS.

Effort Not Concealed.

It is hard to put a new twist in an old strand of ideas and not let the audience see the conscious effort of your energies. Salisbury Field has not concealed his wires as well as might be in this variant of the halt-at-the-altar brand of farce comedy. The numerous combinations and variations have been so *fully expounded* that little remains save a fairly

good role for a clever actress. Credibility often goes to pieces and it is up to the actress to pick it up. Naturally, then, the characters lapse into author's puppets jerking all ways with his wires.

Problem.

1. A divorcee intercepts her successor.
2. The bridegroom wavers between the two.
3. The divorcee gets him.

The second clause of this Problem is obviously lame. There is no crisis to the Plot, no big moment to transfix his choice. There is an attempt at another middle premise but it is too trivial to constitute the hinge of Plot. Reality is diluted in order to maintain conditions that will submit to the ultimate solution. The hero's intended bride is made so incredible that the entire piece has little basis for belief. We can accept it only as a picture to place a pretty actress in. The play has many bright moments and much smart Dialog that surpass current competition, but as a Conflict it is laborious and continually creaks with artifice.

DECLASSEE.

Sophistication and Infancy.

It is a strange fate that mingles the ultra sophistication of society with the infancy of dramatic concept. Zoe Atkins has unconsciously achieved this feat in telling us the troubles of a thoroughbred lady vagrant in terms of childish technic. It is an amateurish attempt to dramatize a decayed, hybrid civilization which has little appeal to us honest souls of humble pedigree. It is obviously a play to pomp and pedantry. It is as unamerican as a Plot could well be. It is not a play, but merely the voyage of a *prodigal ladyship* on a very supercilious sea.

Problem.

1. A lady champions a card cheat.
2. He reclaims himself.
3. She is killed by a taxi.

A thousand Problems could not do justice to the bypaths of Plot that serve to render the Conflict of this play chaotic. A succession of false starts gives rise to hopes that the play is to be about one thing or another and a smattering of half-expressed hints leads us to anticipate an end to this evanescent thing which has had no healthful beginning. The ending is as dismal as the start is distraught and for Ethel Barrymore it can serve no purpose further than to make hypocrites of her friends who profess to like her in the part.

APHRODITE.**A Resplendent Spectacle.**

The dominant impression of the technician at such a stupendous outlay of theatric capital is the hopelessness of entertaining a democratic crowd with a mere appeal to the eye. The war, with all its extravagance has shot the limit of human expectations far beyond the reach of mortal imitator. And for a time, at least, it will be safer for the producer of gorgeous spectacles to unite his efforts with a romance of sufficient heart throb to sustain interest in the story of the play. Even the lavish appeal of sex is not sure enough when no credible plot concentrates it. Like the three-ring circus, it palls, and audiences are confined to those who almost prefer the appalling.

Problem.

1. A sculptor loves a courtesan.
2. She requires him to commit crime.
3. He renounces her.

There is no cohesion in this Problem and therefore little for a crowd to cling to even in the remotest way. Big spectacles should be pre-eminently simple and the more you pile on ancient forms and obsolete customs the greater the difficulty there is in selling it to an average audience. Librettos and footnotes are futile. It is like a moving picture that is half printed text, the beholders do not come there to spell out the author's part. They expect him to dramatize it for them. Encumber all this with a burden of mythology and you have some of the obstacles that "Aphrodite" tries in vain to survive.

A LITTLE JOURNEY.

A Conflict of Superficial Feelings.

This plot offers a solution for almost any disenchanted pair of lovers. Give them a baby and nine-tenths of their troubles vamoose. What most estranged couples need is the human seedling to cement them. Then there would be no opportunity for the frivolities of vexation. Rachel Crothers has written a very sweet little comedy but it is a question whether the average auditor feels this delicate spray of moonshine. Can he see why the lovers do or do not get together? Then, too, it is hard to mix this romantic fragrance with the low comedy stunts of the last act. And it is utterly inconceivable that the girl should contemplate suicide so far as the audience goes. Neither should the girl hesitate long after the stranded baby unites the lovers. These vagaries do much to spoil the play for general patronage. Its exquisite temperament is a trifle too fine for the playgoing public. Like the same author's other play, "39 East" is not quite definite enough to endure.

Problem.

1. A pampered girl is cast adrift.
2. She rejects an honest suitor.
3. A stranded babe unites them.

Here is the nucleus of a very virile play. If Miss Crothers had only clung to the inherent elements she might have had a masterpiece. There are too many superficial feelings and motives etched on to the stury framework of the Problem. Embroidered emotions are felt only by the selected few, and unless these are put up in very appetising packages the market may not prove active enough to popularize the product.

TIGER TIGER.**Imported Viewpoint.**

A devitalized technic undermines this play. It is always difficult to utilize British viewpoint in the American theatre. Where an Englishman might think it perfectly proper for a cook to fall in love with a statesman and then refuse to marry and degrade him, the Yankee would have his heart set on evolving her to a higher species where she might marry the M. P. with propriety. And in "Tiger Tiger" she does evolve. It would be impossible to get any other verdict from a composite crowd in this country. It is the only outcome an American can desire if he is true to the principles of democracy.

Problem.

1. A statesman seduces a cook.
2. She lifts him to great heights.
3. She will not degrade him by marriage.

The cook as portrayed by Miss Frances Starr gives every evidence of consistent evolution. It is

only British public opinion that holds her down. It is only the aristocrat who fears to contemplate social evolution. The cook's ascent would be the normal American ending for the play. Instead we get the extraneous fourth act which attempts to glorify the resigned martyrdom of this girl by way of an epitaph mourning her idol's death. Meantime the cook marries a bumpkin.

But this rambling fiction method is more or less the style of the whole play. There is no cohesion to the Conflict, the Plot runs on at random and the tedious shifts of scenery become obnoxious because they lead us nowhere. For entertainment the play relies mostly upon raw sex analysis. It goes the limit of passion in public and furnishes a poor part for the star it is destined to fit.

BUSINESS BEFORE PLEASURE.

Potash & Perlmutter in Pictures.

It is a good deal like base ball, this Potash play-going, unless we are all fans the game doesn't thrive. Whether it is because the idea is running out or whether the motion picture industry doesn't afford as many funny stunts, the fact remains that "Business Before Pleasure" seems a little hardput for Yiddish humor. The firm of Glass & Goodman do not seem at their best in this version of the established brand of Ishgabibble but the writer is estimating from a performance in a country town without the big city cast and customers. Under these conditions many of the situations seem forced and fail to elicit the comic response so spontaneous in earlier editions. No doubt environment, actors and audience have much to do with it.

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FOR APRIL

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QUARTERLY

1920

JULY

THE SIGN ON THE DOOR.

A Truly Great Intrigue.

For sound technic and tense intrigue this play surpasses any work of the season. "The House of Glass" was our first analysis of loose logic Conflicts which could be riddled by a word of common sense at any point of puncture. Channing Pollock has built a better play with much the same weakness. This weakness demonstrates his strength, for it summons the height of genius to fabricate such structure and not let the audience detect your transparencies. The playwright must hypnotize you into feeling as the wife feels; nose to the grindstone of fear and defamation. But the main Problem is of a different texture.

Problem.

1. A sleuth saves a girl from assault.
2. Later she shoots the assailant.
3. Her prosecutor is the quondam sleuth.

There are a hundred and one turns to the Plot of this Problem, but if you are ever to get a clear concept of Problem you must sidestep the bypaths of Plot to dig down to the fundamental elements of the Conflict. By far the greatest merit of this play

is the third clause of Problem for it caps the Climax with a thrill of ecstasy seldom experienced in the theatre. The author has timed his Sequence nicely. When the heroine is hard put and all extrication seems cut off, a phrase of her confession recalls clause No. 1 to the prosecutor's mind and he corroborates her story. He was disguised as a waiter in a private dining room when the would-be seducer made his attack on the girl. It is a situation that demands deft handling. It could easily be sent to absurdity. But instead it is the most profound moment in the play. Our emotions are so tensely wrought that we accept it with suppliant gratitude. The master hand has planted the seed of Climax and our emotions are cleverly tricked. But this is the art of playwriting. When you can contrive according you will have reached the craftsman's chair.

SEEING THINGS.

A Spook Satire.

Miss Margaret Mayo has made a clever satire out of Aubrey Kennedy's spook farce and filled every moment with full satisfaction save the one big moment, the Climax. Here she falls flat so far as inherent possibilities go. After spinning a yarn for two and a half acts she lets go the end of the string and loses the highest reward of her labor. This does not minimize the actual merit of the farce, it does deprecate reaching less than its limit. The innate Problem promises a certain height. The working Problem is as follows:

Problem No. 1.

1. A wife feigns spirit form.
2. Her skeptic husband is converted.
3. She gives the snap away.

Now the innate Problem would be something like this:

Problem No. 2.

1. A wife feigns spirit form.
2. Her skeptic husband is converted.
3. His devout belief brings her back.

Of course, this is sticking strictly to farce extravagance. It does not exceed the bounds of foodledom set by the play. This may not be the best solution, but the method illustrates the means of acquiring a consistent third clause of Problem. The action of the first upon the second should invariably produce the third. Then the hypothesis is sounded. The audience instinctively expects such an issue and when the authors do not toe the scratch there is dumb disappointment.

SCANDAL.

A Naughty Inanity.

Cosmo Hamilton shows his best technical composition in a play of false mood and artful sophistication. It concerns a stratum of society verging on moral degeneracy and decay. The hero and heroine are not endowed with human feelings. They have not touched life save through silk and silver. As such the play is a remarkable exhibit of the Second Law of Nature as applied to these decadent characters. It is not easy to excite human emotions with hyper-human puppets.

Problem.

1. A girl feigns marriage to avert scandal.
2. Her nominal husband demands fulfillment.
3. This tantilizing leads to marriage.

This is not an adequate reduction of the Plot from all angles, for the play wanders flippantly from caprice to caprice and its Problem could no more simulate logic than its people simulate life. They are the froth and bubble of ease and idleness with no anchorage on the firm realities of existence. It requires more skill, perhaps, to make such marmalade palatable than to stop up the appetite with blackberry jam. Particularly is this true where most of the audience bring a good honest hunger to the theatre rather than a fastidious overtaste for trifles. Instead of bedroom farce, this play is a counterpane comedy. But the linens are handled with exquisite care and the inference is never vulgar. There are few writers adequately equipped to concoct these naughty inanities.

MY LADY FRIENDS.

Delightfully Frivolous.

Take a cup of frivolity, sprinkle it with nonsense and mix well with irresponsibility, and you have the kind of pie "My Lady Friends" bite into. It offers untold opportunities for a fickle farceur like the late Clifton Crawford. In fact a great deal depends upon the star's creative knack of filling out a manuscript of this character. He necessarily transforms the original intent of the authors, at times, and welds the play in his own forge of personality.

Problem.

1. A wife skimps scrupulously.
2. Her husband philanthropizes others.
3. She renounces penury.

There is a promise of playfulness in the Problem, —but by far the greater bulk of fun is manufactured by

the damfool attitudes of the actor. Like "Fair and Warmer," it is the utter irresponsibility of the stupids that renders their intimacies innocent. Played at this angle the reflex of sinfulness is a very funny spectacle and a cast of clever comedians scamper through it with hilarious results. At best this class of play is a 50-50 composition, half done in script and the rest in rehearsal.

THE SKIN GAME.*

Obsolete Melodramatic Must.

But the greatest offense of this play is not its antiquated Conflict, it is the attempt to prosecute the antagonist with extraneous implements which have no place in the Plot. Any child could write a play if all the ingredients of the universe were at his disposal. The real playwright restricts his endeavor to the properties circumscribed by his Problem. He can go out and incorporate foreign factors if he cares to legalize them by the hard labor of Dramatization, but this is neither good playwriting nor idle industry. It is a process of transmutation which only the adept can undertake. Mr. Galsworthy is not an adept.

Problem.

1. An upstart insults a snob.
2. The snob threatens a scandal.
3. The quarrel is called off.

The utter amateurishness of this play can best be illustrated by analogy. Suppose we demoralize a sound structure like Ibsen's "A Doll's House," by retaining a Pinkerton sleuth to look up Nora's past instead of presenting the case against her in the person of Krogstad, one of the vital exponents of

Plot. Here we have a hint of the inefficacy of a great novelist trying to dash off a play between chapters. To legalize his witnesses who fetch in the scandal of the daughter-in-law's sordid past, they should in some way be hitched to the upstart's effort to place his unsightly smokestacks in the Snob's picturesque landscape. The upstart's activity should stir up the scandal which recoils on his own head. Then the Climax would have validity.

As the Conflict now stands there is no fight between Good and Evil and the finish is merely a draw. The author paints in dark colors, utilizing no light and shade. The clash is between bad and evil elements for whose victory the audience holds not choice. The technical defects are the only points of value to the student. Their revision would not make this document a play. The entire framework is futile. A new one is needed. If Mr. Galsworthy really wants to learn the art of playbuilding he had better abandon descriptive analysis until he absorbs the psychology of the crowd.

* Charles Scribners' Sons, New York, \$2.50.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

A Magnificent Mystery Theme.

Here is a play by an unknown author which seems to give the impression of wide technical experience. Possibly the veneer is the work of the producer, but the foundations must have been laid in the script. The clockwork looks like an Owen Davis melodrama. There are a few clouds and obscurities to obstruct the clarity and speed of the try-out, but when these are eliminated the Plot will shoot like an arrow.

Problem.

1. A crime is rehearsed to persuade the prosecutor.
2. The mock crime merges into reality.
3. The prosecutor is won over.

There is a classic tone to this Problem. The puzzle part of the program is well conjured. There is a trifle more subtlety needed to lift the play up to its own high standard, and when these things are properly adjusted New York will receive a new thrill and a new author at one and the same premiere.

THE GUEST OF HONOR.**Another Hodge-Podgery.**

Mr. Hodge is not particular about the play qualities of his vehicle so long as they afford him a place in the sun. In this sense it is embarrassing for the actor to be also the author of a few patent situations designed to fetch him forth at all hazards. This latest collection is a patchwork of threadbare, old-school, off-stage, self-pumped situations in which a boy actor runs away with the histrionic honors and the Third Law of Nature gobbles up the rest. This parental pull is a lucky asset.

Problem.

1. A poor man adopts a boy.
2. His aunt kidnaps the child.
3. She is forced to marry the man.

It would be ungracious not to commend the constant patter sprinkled liberally throughout the dialog. Next to the father and child note this is the strongest merit in the work. It is again humiliating to admit that most of these speeches fall to the author who utters them in a false-tooth, hot-mush sort of a way that passes for personality. At any

rate, the piece is better than Mr. Hodge's last venture, "A Cure for Curables," and there are possibilities in it that warrant any amount of labor he might expend. Energy would be well invested in eliminating the obsolete traits of structure. It requires more skill to do these things in a modern convincing way, but the Problem shows that such effort is warranted.

LADIES' DAY.

Edward Peple's Palest.

Of course, there is always the comeback that a play should not be judged in its try-out, but unless this farce is completely reordered there will be little but the exhibits of female freaks to commend it. It bore the stamp of unreadiness, yes, but the break-in performances bore nothing else. It is as unlike the Peple trade-mark as anything could well be. The Conflict is desultory, the Recoil is not sprung and the idea intended is not rounded out.

Problem.

1. The ladies frame up their jury.
2. The men defeat them in legal strategy.
3. The ladies have them pinched.

This is about all the head or tail there is to the Plot. It verges on the making of a very popular play, but for want of central purpose the thing goes wrong. It does not satisfy from any standpoint; the promise is so much bigger than the fulfillment. Directors may think that continual puttering will work out an acceptable piece but we are of the opinion that the spine needs correction. It neither stands nor reclines. It wobbles feebly. Its only

sign of life is the intermittent moments of comedy coming more from the players than the play. Get under, Mr. Pepel, the flaws are not on the surface, but beneath.

The future of the play at this writing seems to rest entirely with the rehearsal possibilities of the female jury.

DADDIES.

A Contagious Laugh Tonic.

Elaborate the idea of "A Bachelor's Baby," season it with a little war stuff and you have the sum total of "Daddies" in the same key of convulsive laughter. In place of the one baby use a dozen, more or less, but keep the same parental perversion. This comic variety would not constitute a play but there is a thin layer of Second Law emotion running alongside which affords a flimsy backbone.

Problem.

1. A writer adopts a war orphan.
2. She turns out an adolescent helpmate.
3. He marries his adopted daughter.

There are numerous by-plots in this detached series of episodes, but they are more or less valid since the piece purports to be nothing more than a first class bundle of tricks, and they are so well put over that no one can quarrel about technic. In fact it is one of the few heteronomous concoctions that pays its way with sustained entertainment. It is a tribute to the funny bone of John H. Hobble and a credit to brother Belasco, though it might even play without his exquisite craftsmanship.

EAST IS WEST.**An Overrated Exhibition.**

This play is five times as successful in drawing audiences as in moving them. To be brutally frank it seems like an amateur exhibition, played by school children and produced by art students, when compared with a masterpiece like "The Son-Daughter" done to a finish in every detail. But in drawing power it unquestionably surpasses and its life will be longer, no doubt. This is one of the puzzles of play production, and one of the elements that go to make the gamble so fascinating.

Problem.

1. An American loves a Chinese girl.
2. His family rejects her.
3. She is not Chinese.

If you could simply say Presto! and solve things as easily as this Problem does, playwriting would indeed be a pastime. But what about its success? you may say. Ah, success is always an enigma in this game whether the script is well made or miserable. In fact the capacity for picking a winner is as distinct from writing one as dawn from daylight. Messrs. Shipman and Hymer are to be congratulated upon their luck rather than their talents in this instance. They are probably as much puzzled as the public on what wins their play its popular approval.

UNDER ORDERS.**A Theatrical Compress.**

Berte Thomas deserves a special award from the war board economy committee for conserving actors' energies. It would hustle many more eminent playwrights to rival his resourcefulness in this regard.

The play is an object lesson on Intrigue and Plot. The whole forte of the dramatist is the compression of purposes into persons and places that Plot makes imperative. He cannot flicker from place to place as the films do. "Under Orders" is the quintessence of theatrical compress. From this viewpoint it should be studied as a masterpiece.

Problem.

1. A woman sacrifices her son to expose a spy.
2. Her son is rescued.
3. She has lost her mind in grief.

If this Problem is correct the story of the play is largely surplus narrative for it does not stick to this trail. Perhaps this is due to the novelty of playing four parts with two players. The second and third acts are closely knit. The first and fourth bear most of the blunders. But it is bad business picking flaws in a successful novelty. Suppose we point out the pronounced merits of the work.

The crisis of this play is tense and thrilling. The mother welcomes home her soldier son only to find that it is not he but his cousin in disguise—a German spy! The situation is immense! It is as big a military moment as the war has inspired. It compensates for all the frailties of Acts I and IV which we call attention to merely that you may study them for profit. Study also this powerful punch. It is a whale!

LILAC TIME.

Should Make a Good Movie.

Nothing but the glamor of military times would let such a fragile piece float into the theatre. It is the frailest product conceivable for a woman of Miss—

Cowl's knowledge of things theatric. There are so many misleading allusions that the rightful plot has a hard time getting started. Off-stage reference to things which happened at a club back in New York seriously muddle the French story of here and now. The poor audience grasps at straws of dawning plot only to be deceived willfully by the lady authors. Nothing seems well woven. It must be a fact that the playwrights in question are not good knitters.

Problem.

1. A soldier mates before marriage.
2. He does not return.
3. His war bride bears the burden.

There is no technical demand in this Problem for the mock heroic antecedents of the soldier. An actor might easily enthuse over the opportunity given for theatric byplay and slap-in-the-face situations but a playwright cannot legitimately merge the two stories and give them relative importance in the Plot. For this back-home happening is lugged well into the second act before we find that nothing is to come of it. The authors evidently considered this bit of martyrdom a good background to paint heroism on. Narrated nobleness is seldom of material worth in a plot. What we SEE is the real portrait. The eye, not the ear is the channel for all crucial points of a play.

GREATER THAN FAME.

Flimsy Film Fiction.

With excellent atmosphere and more than average photography this picture sinks into mediocrity by virtue of its flimsy Plot structure. Even the beauty of a promising young actress is more or less

marred by the inability of the play to portray her to sympathetic advantage. If photoplay producers think they can afford to neglect the sound coherence of Conflict they have only to glance at the following Problem to see its basic fallacies. Human nature demands more substance than this in a story and the present exhaustion of film fiction should warn movie management against utilizing such frail narratives.

Problem.

1. A girl seeks a career.
2. She declines charity and prostitution.
3. She gets there anyhow.

The time is coming when a movie audience will not endure the hundred minutes required of them to see a photoplay unless the emotional experience depicted is of sufficient intensity to compensate them for the time consumed. Film makers have educated a large and profitable public to the habit of needing visual emotional stimulus. The supply of that commodity now seems to be running short. Some very drastic measures must be taken to sustain the dramatic quality of the photoplay if it is to hold its future sway with the paying public. Flush financial conditions may avert the issue while they last.

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LUTHER B. ANTHONY, Editor

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QUARTERLY

1920

OCTOBER

ALREADY REVIEWED.

Now in New York.

"The Guest of Honor," see page 1013, July, 1920, issue.

"The Woman of Bronze," see page 980, January, 1920, issue.

"The Mob," see page 510, October, 1914, issue.

MOM.

Another Harvard Product.

When you eventually see this play it will doubtless be rechristened. It should be. But if in the diligent revision that is required, the fervent atmosphere of home life is lost, the play doctors will have killed more than they can cure. Nevertheless, doctors are demanded in this play judging from its early road break-in. Atmosphere, no matter how pure, gentle and fragrant will hardly carry a play in this frantic era of exuberance.

Problem.

1. A mother parts with her children.
2. Her love saves a daughter from adultery. -
3. Her love nurses a boy through the flu.
4. She finances the boy's college education by marrying the younger daughter to the man who was willing to seduce the married sister.

You would be horrified to read such a digest in the daily paper as the synopsis of a play you intended seeing. So would the author, and yet she has made just this much of a botch out of her lovely atmospheric concept of a play. This seems to be the Harvard trademark, however: no definite Problem, at least no deliberate design to install one. The '47 student is bounded only by the four points of the compass so far as controlling Conflict goes. The author of this play is a Harvard product.

A passing glance at this Problem reveals the four disjoined elements that are attempted by Miss Rachel Barton Butler. A giant of stagecraft could hardly merge them. What she needs to decide is the human story she will insert as a picture to grace her exquisite background of New England domestic atmosphere. She has the canvass ready for the picture, but has daubed on so many fragments of different incidents that an audience can merely marvel at the cubistic incongruity.

A distinct melodrama starts off in the second act which had in no way taken genesis in the first. This morbid episode suddenly vanishes and in III we witness the needlessly painful girations of a lad in the throes of pneumonia. If this malady had an adequate purpose, if it were demanded by Plot or Conflict, the harrowing exhibition might be tolerated.† But to depict this pain as a useless cog in a runaway flying machine is a law twice transgressed. The corruption of the young hero who is to finally save the family fortunes, is equally futile. The gentle

† See valid example in "Sabotage," a playlet printed in full in our January, 1914, issue, sent upon receipt of original price—25 cents.

mood of the play is continually disrupted by similar stigmas. A simple straightforward Problem would correct the whole anatomy of the cripple. All it lacks is a Plot spine.

POLDEKIN.

Deserves Better Dramatization.

The patriotic propaganda supposed to be satirized in "Poldekin" deserves much better dramatization. Booth Tarkington has evidently done this piece without the aid of a collaborator and the dismissal is premature. He needs years of coaching if this effort is a criterion. If the project were merely an attempt to fit our George Arliss with a vehicle, the makeshift misses the mark. Mr. Arliss is made to seem like a frolicking little female basking about among a bunch of masquerading marauders. No one seems real, no one has a definite purpose nor parody, and no one is actuated by credible impulse.

Problem.

1. A printer poses as a Red leader.
2. He substitutes patriotism for anarchy.
3. He wins the heart of the Red heroine.

This is not exactly the Problem of the play, for it has none. It is the nearest we can come to the intended syllogism, but the outlines of any tangible meaning are so vague that only a conjurer could connect them. And still the subject holds a splendid Problem. If Mr. Tarkington's excellent intentions were molded by some clever stagecraftsman a highly salutary Americanizing message might result. What is the process through which this untrimmed material should pass?

Suppose that Poldekin, instead of being a simpering buffoon, is really a Russian terrorist. Suppose

he comes to this country hell-bent for combustion. Suppose, instead of meeting a stray Chinese, a nigger and a hussy, his experience led him through some sustained, invigorating episode of American evolution, wholly paralyzing to his squint vision of freedom. Wouldn't this be a wholesome lesson in Americanization? The idea is there and indeed it is much needed. But the Tarkington method of imparting it to a composite crowd is entirely erroneous. Why not study the physical aspects of drama, Mr. Tarkington? The play must possess a body before it can convey a soul. You would not try to circulate a novel without the aid of printer's ink. Why attempt that more difficult feat of making a play without motive to propel it.

THE ACQUITTAL.

Rita Wellman's Arrival.

"The Gentile Wife" was a weak, untrue tragedy of racial prejudice. It possessed an abundance of original Yiddish humor but solved its cause in the author's favor, not the fair play of common sense. "The Acquittal," on the contrary, makes no apology for the author's interference but weaves its plot out of the impulses of the people involved. It is one of the best intrigues of the past season and serves as Rita Wellman's arrival in the ring. If she wrote this play she is a full-fledged playwright.

Problem.

1. A wife frees her husband-murderer.
2. He accuses her of a lover accomplice.
3. She weds the falsely accused accomplice.

The Problem as well as the Plot of this play is securely locked tight. There is hardly a leak for a lawyer to fathom. There can be none unless he

resists the spell of the playwright. Of, course, some of this weather-tightness may be the craftsmanship of the producer and the stage director. This is inevitably the case where two such masters as Mr. Cohan and Mr. Forrest are concerned. It is an honor even to conceive a thread for their workmanship. But we presume that most of the framework is Miss Wellman's, for her previous accomplishment showed quick promise of humor and intrigue.

THE GOLD DIGGERS.

Adultery Not Art.

It is always unpopular to assail a current success even though it merely titillates your lower impulses. But since technic is the trend of this journal we have no other course than to discriminate. "The Gold Diggers" wins on ulterior suggestion rather than dramatic accomplishment. For the sake of this suggestion audiences seem satisfied to sit through pages of tedious or mildly amusing detail lending no particular aid to entertainment or plot. The whole structure gives the impression of hurried cogitation content with gratifying financial results. It is art; the art of monetary attraction.

Problem.

1. A girl disenchants her chum's suitor.
2. She wins his uncle for herself.
3. This restores her chum's suitor.

As stagy as the stage itself, this creaky device is getting the money of two sustained seasons. It must mean that the newly rich generation of playgoers is oblivious to everything but the environment of dissolute morale which infests everything following a war. Of course, the critic who blames the play because he does not like it is licked. But to discrim-

inate and say that it is not liked as a play but as something else is another sort of criticism.

To be sure, there are one or two touches of real histrionic merit in this Plot. But they are foisted by foundations so false that it is hard to respond even to isolated instances. We never know from one moment to the next what the heroine is out for. Her impulses are never quite dramatized. Her caprices are flashed without motive or preparation. You must simply be content with a very clever caricature of the worst phase of a chorus girl's morals. The exception is exhibited as the rule. The play is popular because it profanes the female in a breezy show-girl vernacular.

LADIES' NIGHT.

Perverted Appeal.

What federal health authorities and all sincere educators are trying to banish is the red flag of sex suggestion. Plays like "Ladies' Night" are undoing all of these efforts. The undraped skin need not be a topic for taboo but it is hardly a thesis for theatrical analysis. When it receives the sanction of an audience it assumes the power of public opinion. Any pure girl must leave such an exhibition with a sense of being seared. Any clean boy undergoes a relapse of rectitude if he submits to its influence without repugnance. The perversion may not have been the aim of the authors but it is certainly the intent of the theme as the Problem clearly implies.

Problem.

1. A man is lured by low neck gowns.
2. He beholds a ladies' bath.
3. He is cured.

For the mature playgoer there is nothing in this nonsense but a lot of lusty laughs. The odor of immorality does not infest the sophisticated unless he happens to be a parent. It may loosen his ethics a notch or so, but it is the callow youth who suffers by this lascivious psychology. It is hardly a safe subject for dramatic derision. Of course, we are all prudes and Puritans who feel this offense. But isn't it true, nevertheless, that the play which promotes such a purpose in a civilized community is the play that is going wrong? And what about the said community?

THE TREASURE.*

A Stupid Yiddish Symbolic Slumber.

It seems almost pitiful that the Theatre Guild, which assumes a higher intent in the theatre should select this hopelessly crude document for the opening of their season at the Garrick Theatre. If it is anything whatsoever it is an example of cheap racial appeal to be shunned by the better players and craftsmen, and David Pinski wins nothing more than a title to insignificance by his tireless narration of untheatric incident. It is a stupid slumber listlessly projected as a symbolic thesis.

Problem.

1. An imbecile finds some coins.
2. The community is agog for treasure.
3. The suspected booty proves a myth.

A similar mistake was made last year in attempting to put on "The Faithful,"† Masefield's foggy notion of drama. The endeavor to dramatize a whole community has never proven successful. Au-

* B. W. Huebsch, New York, \$1.

† See p. 968, the October, 1919, issue.

diences cannot merge their souls in a mob. There must be Unity. They need one distinct hero or heroine to pin their sympathies upon. They also require some definite source of emotion to stir them, not the vague symbol of the lure of wealth, but the reaction of that wealth upon Self, Sex or Parentage.‡ One of these three fundamental laws of life must underlie a thesis, no matter how satirical, no matter how whimsical, no matter how weird the acting opportunities might be. Let the Guild demonstrate their right to their title by choosing something at least theatrical.

‡ See Chap. II, p. 694, the July, 1916, issue.

SLEEPING PARTNERS.

Unsuccessful Sensuality.

When the only basis of appeal in a play is sensuality, and that appeal falls short, the failure is indeed embarrassing. To be nasty and succeed is some satisfaction, no doubt. But to descend for sex focus and then not make an appealing descent is humiliating both for author and actors. It leaves a certain smudge on the unsavory enterprise.

Problem.

1. A wife sleeps in a roué's apartment.
2. Her husband spends the night at large.
3. His fears of discovery shield her.

For frank French farce this Problem has its technical virtues. The hit-back is good Recoil. Sacha Guitry probably left no doubt in his original as to the wife's infidelity. Seymour Hicks, in the translation leaves you to dramatize the lasciviousness yourself. You must share in your own demoralization. It is a question which form of vice is more *subtle*. Both are abominable in American ethics.

3 WISE FOOLS.

Classic Comedy Quality.

Few authors have been so successful in spinning comedy and weaving melodrama with one and the same hand. Austin Strong gave no promise of this technical skill in his earlier efforts. He must have written scores of unproduced plays in between. He is an architect by training and his first impulse should be to build rather than relate. In this play he comes into his own for his structure is architecturally compact. It ranks as a classic in present day attainment and has a tendency to lift the art.

Problem.

1. Three old wiseheads adopt a girl.
2. They find her a criminal by deduction.
3. She is innocent.

The weak member of this Problem is its third clause. The fundamental beams are not built as sound as the superstructure. The conclusion does not ensue from the action of One on Two. The girl's innocence should establish itself out of the means the three wise fools take to deduce evidence against her. In a round-about route the Problem wiggles its way to a conclusion and the thing is so well done we willingly overlook this rudimentary error. But there is more applause awaiting the consistent Problem.

The comedy of this structure is its highest mark and occasionally ascends from humor to wit. It is not the scrap-book variety spliced on to fetch a flippant laugh. It is inherent in the story and arises spontaneously to a degree not often equalled on the American stage. The drama is advancing as a few plays of the day testify. This is one of them.

BUDDIES.**A Musical Farce.**

"Buddies" sets a new pace in tuneful drama. It has the charm of comedy plus the grace of opera minus most of the absurdities and folderol of choruses and grotesque. Incidentally it unfolds a congenial little love story.

Problem.

1. A soldier helps his buddy propose.
2. He gets in dutch with his own girl.
3. The buddy's success saves his goat.

This is a highly frivolous aspect of playwriting but it is an innovation and innovations are worth millions to musical comedy. The farce has a personality which should be revered by all true dramatists. Its jokes are of its own hatching and its humor is inherent coming out of the characterization of its puppets in the process of creation.

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NOTE.—This index is arranged for ready reference to subject, page and issue. The volume indicates the fiscal year, the number signifies the issue of that year and the page shows the location of the article in that particular issue. In ordering any given play or criticism, merely give name and index figures as printed below.

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Vol. XII

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No. 1

QUARTERLY

1921

JANUARY

CALL THE DOCTOR.

New Vocational Calling.

There is nothing new under the sun and the artist's only resource in creating is to combine old parts in a way to make a new whole. This is the first merit of Jean Archibald's current play which Janet Beecher has given florid flesh to. Her exquisite embodiment of the doctor of domestic vicissitudes earns more than half the rating that the play acquired. For it is her ability that offsets such defects as impair the piece. She overflows her own role and fills many crevices neglected by author and cast.

Problem.

1. A conjugal doctor prescribes coquetry.
2. Her client's husband also seeks remedy.
3. She administers a double dose of fidelity.

The theme of this Conflict is thin and throws the burden of entertainment upon the function of abstract Dialog. Just how well Mr. Archibald has fabricated this superficial fringe can be appreciated only in Mr. Belasco's production. For it requires super stagecraft to keep a bubble continuously tilting in the air. Most audiences want something they can come in contact with. The bubble breaks if

penetrated by meddlesome minds. It is the producer's task, then, to keep it ever twinkling before the eye of the auditor so as to prevent his mental awakening.

We have been asked what accounts for the play's brief run on Broadway. The fresh concept seems worthy of a longer hearing. A disproportioned cast might be the cause. The overacting of the silly little wife impersonated by a stalwart player like Charlotte Walker is calculated to offend the sophisticated theatregoer. The contrast against the superbly valid acting of the conjugal doctor only enunciates this flaw. This is particularly true of the last and weakest act. Such discrepancies are difficult for the player to determine and are sometimes too obstinate for the director to efface. It would be hard to say what share this has in retarding the run of a play entitled to longer life in the lime light.

THE BROKEN WING.

A Corking Melodrama.

Here is a play that accomplishes all that its predecessors have achieved plus procedure according to principle. In other words, it mystifies according to dramatic law. There is no doubt that it is the best example of "Under Cover" drama extant, with all the errors of that school erased. One flaw after another peeps over the horizon only to have its head clipped off by the playwright's super surgery. In fact there are no flaws in this current masterpiece once we make due allowance for the poetic license of its class. And the authors do not even ask your leave. For they so thoroughly dramatize us that incidentals are annihilated.

Problem.

1. An aviator is held for ransom.
2. His friends feign payment.
3. His captors are duped.

If the authors had reduced their plot to Problem they would be able to see a better division for act periods, perhaps, avoiding some of the sterile moments that result from a division into four acts. But this, again, is a hypercritical statement for the reason that no one spectator out of a hundred found any fault with the play—it was a gem. It is like tampering with the health of a healthy man. It is wiser to make well enough welcome. The time for such improvement is at the birth of the child, the eugenics of playbuilding, in other words. The profit in studying this piece of art is its technical positives, not its negative lapses.

The foremost merit from a synthetic standpoint is the authors' reclamation of the hero's memory. This is much less theatric and more truly psychologic than nine-tenths of the amnesian exploits of the stage. Song is a powerful stimulant to recall. The whippoorwill's phrase is cleverly confused with the strains of "Over There." After repeated taps upon the subconscious the recollection of our hero returns. This is true Ibsenian technic. It compares favorably with the great Norwegian's patient repetitions of preparation in "The Wild Duck." The technic of Messrs. Dickey and Goddard begins to look like a D. D. P. P.; a doctor's degree in Practical Playwriting.

ENTER MADAME.**Study in Sophisticated Artifice.**

If incest and seduction were polite themes for plays, "Enter Madame" could not come under the

ensor. But like every other factor following a world war, the dear old public has lost its morale and is countenancing sophisticated appeals to the lower impulses with the bland indifference of a *demi-monde*. This play endeavors to soften the curse by tantalizing only the passions of semi-divorced and semi-betrothed couples. It is another case of actress be thy own plot, for there is little Conflict interest beside her lure of second-hand sex.

Problem.

1. A husband divorces his temperamental spouse.
2. She seduces him through super-sex lure.
3. They try it again.

We do not wish to convey the impression that despite the absence of substance there are not some very good isolated Scenes in this piece. The atmosphere is as artificial as a Bromo Selzer on Sunday, but when viewed with an eye to dissolute imagery the play has some merit aside from its histrionic success. The city playgoing public seems to prefer the perverted picture of theatrical life and so long as the players themselves promote these parodies the dear old public will probably help foist such histrionic falsehoods. Sensuality is not so repugnant when put up in sugar-coated capsules. And it is base Puritanic ingratitude to dissect the actress' artistic effort to degrade her calling.

ANNA ASCENDS.

Mixture of Adept and Amateur Craftsmanship.

That the poorly constructed play often affords better acting opportunities for a solitary actress is again evinced in "Anna Ascends." The play is not much for technic nor truth, but it gives Alice Brady

a chance to demonstrate an excellence of emotional power which many finer manuscripts fail to offer. This is the lesson of "Anna Ascends." Try to link the two ingredients together—good technic and acting elements.

Problem.

1. A waif becomes a great novelist.
2. She is confronted by a sordid past.
3. Her present worth surmounts it.

This Problem does not dig deep enough into the flesh of emotion to stir an audience vitally and still there are momentary thrills that attain adept distinction. The play is a curious composition of incongruous defects which dispute Mr. Ford's familiarity with the subject he has undertaken. He evidently saw moments of histrionic merit rather than consistent character or qualified drama. The cadet's code is poorly interpreted. The result is a descent into sordid melodrama on a parallel with "The Lure" and like censored specimens. It is a final tribute to an epoch of extravagance which knew no scruples. Hurry and scurry predominated playwriting principle. Quality and merit did not count. Now the period of readjustment sets in and good taste is at a premium again. This is a reaction that even the prosperous dramatist must seriously consider.

THE FAMOUS MRS. FAIR.*

"He and She" Dramatized.

This splendid product is a good example of dramatizing the fallow material of a similar comedy by means of making the past present. In "He and She" Miss Crothers has a parallel situation of professional mother separated from father, and daughter going wrong in the interim. She *tells* the seduction

in terms of past happening. James Forbes makes it an event of immediate occurrence. In each instance the daughter's ruin is averted, but how much more dramatic to Experience the girl's salvation by proxy! Problem.

1. A mother goes careering.
2. This sends her husband philandering.
3. Their daughter's dilemma reclaims them.

From a very commonplace beginning this play rises to a height unsuspected at its source. Out of a very leisurely Conflict the author creates a joint Recoil upon the parents and validly lectures to his audience in a catastrophe of no lean proportions. He double-caps his Climax by saving the daughter and her parents at one and the same stroke. The daughter is rescued from the sort of people they have been playing with and her predicament prevents the separation the parents had planned. Mr. Forbes has risen many notches since "The Chorus Lady" and "The Show Shop." He is still tempted to mix his pen with the motives of his puppets, but otherwise, there are few fingerprints of the Author in this masterpiece.

* George H. Doran Company, New York, \$2.50.

LIGHTNING.

A Record-Breaking Run.

There are two sorts of actors. One plays the part he is cast for and the other casts the part he is to play. Frank Bacon is distinctly the latter sort and is oblivious to the perquisites ordinarily supplied the player. He propels his own part against all odds; at least, as many as one weak manuscript can contain. The result is a tribute to the personal charm of this great actor whose methods can be compared to those of the famous Beerbohm Tree.

Problem.

1. A wife seeks a divorce for sordid reasons.
2. Her husband's ingenuousness defends him.
3. She abandons her mercenary suit.

Whenever the second clause of Problem is as general as this one, it is safe to say that the burden of performance is up to the player's personality. Mr. Bacon plays all over the place, adhering neither to motive nor composite credulity. But yet he wins our hearts. In some occult fashion he entwines our sympathies even against incongruities and absurdities that are positively ludicrous. Unlike "Turn to the Right," "Lightning" has no throbbing Conflict. Even its mass prejudices are improbable. We never quite believe that the wife has turned against him. It is a false figment made theatrically real by the emphasis of acting.

The best scene-building is the courtroom situation where old Lightning's lawyer is rejected by the judge. He convinces the court that his attorney cannot be prevented from prompting him and in this way the old codger still wins his legal battle. This seems to be the highest pitch of sympathy and the deepest draft of tears. The play compares technically with "Rip Van Winkle." It holds as good a part for Bacon as "Rip" did for Jefferson. But to say that either is a play is using the language loosely. Both offer fat parts for a particular player's whimsies.

HEARTBREAK HOUSE.**A Rudderless Dreadnaught of Rhetoric.**

A recognized writer may become so affably fluent that his subconscious current flows on irrespective of the susceptibilities of an audience to absorb the

draft. This is the case with Mr. Shaw's rudderless dreadnaught of dramatic rhetoric. It sails on a foaming sea of smart sounds and inverted epigrams. It is an innovation largely because it takes the obverse view of all well established convictions. Shaw's intellectual plot flickers its poor heart away and an empty echo of drama is the only evidence of technical skill.

Why does such a composition attract audiences? Because it assumes to soar above the multitude and graciously invites it to make the ascent to an altitude beyond its zone. This shows a sure sense of showmanship and has worked out admirably in freak plays and Little Theater enterprises. The province of this Journal is to point out that no matter how hyperwittical it is not playwriting but merely one of the veneers that should be pasted over the fibres of a play. It is no guide for the apprentice to go by and is technically as much service to the student as a clever discourse on liquefied air. The work is a monument of entertaining *Talk* to the occasional degree of tediousness. It has some of the superficial symptoms of playbuilding, but few of the fundamentals. It is a long-winded chatter even for G. B. Shaw and is not this wit at his brightest.

THE ACQUITTAL.

Error in Authorship.

Through stupidity plus a misprint in program, the October issue of this journal attributed the clever craftsmanship of "The Acquittal" to Rita Wellman, whereas the author is in reality Rita Weiman. We hereby confer upon the latter lady all that part and parcel of commendation which was inadvertently bestowed upon her fellow playwright.

BREAKFAST IN BED.**Underbred Bedroom Bunk.**

Like "Sleeping Partners,"* "Breakfast in Bed" does not adapt itself to American translation and remains a boorish, illbred mockery of American matrimonial morals. If the original is rotten it is not an easy matter to translate a French farce into a breezy Broadway bedroom play without retaining the dominant germ of vulgarity. This particular attempt holds up to derision the tawdriest affectation of matrimonial mortification.

Problem.

1. A girl undergoes a mock marriage.
2. It proves to be real.
3. She feigns adultery for divorce.

This is the substance of the Plot to this imported farce so sugar coated with banal laughter that the immoral message is swallowed at a gulp. Let us hope that it runs the gamut of bedroom absurdities which found their best examples in "Twin Beds" and "Fair and Warmer." Of course some one had to go the limit to test the bounds of banality in bedroom bunk. But even as obscene suggestion it is not particularly clever. If any self-respecting author wishes to exceed this pattern let him write for foreign export.

* See Oct., 1920, issue.

TEN NIGHTS IN A BAR ROOM.**Rum Regeneration Prophecy.**

It is a wonder that any drama at all resulted from the conglomerate group of murders felicitously amassed in the book from which this play was orig-

inally taken. Robert Dowing and James Castle have greatly improved upon the T. S. Arthur version first perpetrated upon the playgoing public, but fragments of the inconsequent tangles still hamper the spectator who has no knowledge of the novel as originally written.

Problem.

1. A drunkard causes his daughter's death.
2. The blow regenerates him.
3. He becomes a minister.

The old boys did not gasp at a stretch of the imagination so broad that an ordinary act could not contain it. For this besodden bum to suddenly evolve into a minister was a simple presumption for the old-time dramatizers. Such fumbles come from trying to compress an outlandish novel into a three-hour play. This is a task that challenges the keenest Unity expert. Actors are not expert in this capacity, as a rule, for they see atmosphere and acting possibilities (fat parts) before all else.

A nice lesson may be learned from this play to apply to "Mom," reviewed in our last issue. The child dies in "Ten Nights" with the result of regenerating the father. In "Mom" the child writhes in the agonies of pneumonia for character purpose only; to show a mother's love. The first is valid, the second is superficial. The girl in the above Problem drenches the theatre with tears of regeneration. It is only for Plot purpose that such agonies should be inflicted upon the audience. It is in this sense that "Ten Nights in a Bar Room" is a great play. The first two clauses of Problem are eternal.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT.

Educational Adjunct to Titles.

The Famous Players have opened up an entirely new educational adjunct to photoplay exhibits. The written comments between pictures in "Something to Think About" are not of the ordinary variety calculated merely to come within the mental reach of the multitude. They do this service agreeably, but also serve another function. They educate. A sly dash of philosophy is slipped into the explanatory note in such a way as to assault the subconscious and yet not bear the brand of moralizing. Whoever edited these titles, earned new honors for the films, for he adds one more element of education to the vast resources of motion picture production.

THE BUGBEAR OF DIALOG.

The Little Words Dominate.

We hear a great deal about the bugbear of Dialog writing from those who have not profited by a college education and claim in consequence that their vocabularies are deficient. Did it ever occur to you that nine little words do one-fourth the talking in our language and that forty-three words do one-half our entire verbal duty? Thirteen of these words contain only two letters: as, at, be, go, if, it, in, me, of, on, so, to, and we. Fourteen are words of three letters: all, but, can, day, one, say, she, the, and, for, get, her, not, and you. The other most commonly used words in the language are: about, come, dear, have, hear, much, that, there, this, though, time, with, will, your, and write. If these forty-three words do one-half our Dialog for us, where does the cry of verbal bankruptcy come in?

The art of Dialog is to make words inobtrusive. Cumbersome words obstruct the speech save where they are used as pigment to color the pomposity or pretentiousness of the character. If you do not possess these forty-three words in your workshop you can readily procure them. If you do, Mr. Belasco will contribute all the flubdubs needed after he accepts the sum and substance of your great American play. Bear in mind the above paradox when you feel that Dialog is a bugaboo, but strive, nevertheless, to add every new syllable, every new shade of meaning, every close discrimination, every possible synonym, to your list; for you not only need them in weaving Dialog, you must have them to name the images of observation, and observation is almost the whole thing in any kind of literary endeavor.

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LUTHER B. ANTHONY, Editor

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QUARTERLY

1921

APRIL

NEMESIS.

Is Thomas Written Out?

Those who follow the fundamental theory of Nemesis as laid down by this journal will appreciate the universal operation of Recoil in this instance. It assails the author, not the play. Thomas dabbles with the fundamental law of retribution and brings down the inevitable hammer on his own head. His personal Problem might be syllogized as follows.

Problem.

1. Mr. Thomas exploits a pet theory.
2. The audience expects a play.
3. Both theory and play are licked.

Cheer up, Augustus! Shakespeare, Ibsen and Shaw all passed the same fingerpost and ignored the paradox it pointed. They passed the epoch where an audience interested them as much as their own pet processes and proceeded to preach their hobbies rather than dramatize their auditors. In the present instance Mr. Thomas has dramatized a fingerprint theory.

Problem.

1. A husband kills a faithless wife.
2. He counterfeits his rival's fingerprint.
3. The law mechanically electrocutes.

There is undoubtedly a play in these materials, and a very good one, but in his effort to flaunt a newly discovered supposition, Mr. Thomas presents the peculiar spectacle of a master of technic, all dressed up and nowhere to go. Situation, Suspense and Scene Structure are repeatedly employed to no purpose. It is all right for an author to soar above our heads in his personal flights of sophistry, but when he brings his hobby to the theatre he must speak the language of the crowd. Themes may be gathered in this nebular nowhere, but they must be reproduced through the avenues of primitive emotion.

As a general rule it might be set down: when an author's belief dominates the belief of the composite crowd he hasn't a chance. Whoever heard of a falsified fingerprint. It is all author, but coupled with this faulty belief Mr. Thomas listlessly allows his audience to form sympathies and cherish prejudices which he finally slaughters with his own hands. For it is Augustus Thomas who murders these principals, not the Plot.

A possible way to employ Nemesis in driving home the thumbprint theory might be to have the innocent man convicted on this rubberstamp counterfeit and then have the murdered woman come to life in time to declare her preference for the supposed convict. It would be closer to the sympathies engendered in the audience, perhaps, and would evoke a happy ending. The author's hobby would receive ~~all~~ the endorsement it deserves and the Conflict

could still constitute a play in the psychology of the crowd. Such a plot would likewise challenge all of the author's magnificent melodramatic tendencies which crop out in the present document only to have their values devoured by misapplied mass metaphysics.

THE BAT.

A Movie Thriller.

The most overrated play in New York to-day is "The Bat." The influence of the movie is nowhere more apparent than in the susceptibility of an audience for such nonsense. To be sure it is full of creeps and shivers, but these are shot in at any old time irrespective of probability or Sequence. The play soon disintegrates into an irresponsible plot and judged upon the plane of such specimens is not remarkably dextrous. But the audience gasps and giggles like a specially selected society of silly billies.

Problem.

1. Someone has robbed a bank.
2. Everyone is suspected.
3. The detective is the culprit.

As the Problem denotes, this play is a game of robber, robber, who broke the bank. And in the endeavor to play a perfectly good game of pussy-wants-a-corner, all natural emotions of feminine fear are either abnormally suppressed or utterly annihilated. Women stalk around in dark attics with flickering candles and manifest no natural frenzy at weird sounds and strange men's presence. The conclusion of the detective turning out to be the crook and the crook the real detective is not clever.

it ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~the~~ ~~work~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~author~~. The reward is abundant. It goes to the individuality of the actor-author, not the playwright. It shows Mr. Craven has written himself into a part rather than a play and surrounded himself with other parts of the same frankish hue. The whole is a gem of ~~the~~ ~~same~~ ~~kind~~.

It might interest the advanced student to note that the play does not start in the first act. Nothing of the above Problem comes across till the second act. A little reminding of essentials might get the plot started on time. But plot making was not the first thought here. Everything is subordinated to caprice and comedy. Even the final curtain is brought down upon a ~~trick~~ ~~trick~~. The wife hints her expectant motherhood and our hero caps his unattained ~~Craven~~ with: "I hope he's going to like us." But the arbitrary winning is no more clap-trap than all the rest and still it thoroughly enchants us. Moral: Be a Frank Craven, if you can!

SHAVINGS.

An Undramatized Novel.

Pauline Phelps and Marion Short did not dramatize Joseph C. Lincoln's story. The earmarks of fiction are as apparent as ever in their dialogued version. And perhaps it is just as well. Most audiences for this exhibition will be selected from the friends of the novel and it would be a huge task to reconcile them to a correct dramatic translation of the narrative. Greater skill is required than in the original construction of a real play.

Problem.

1. A rube rescues a boy convict.
2. He learns to love his sister.
3. She marries an army officer.

Just as the audience is hoisting a hope that the old fellow will reap his just reward in the hand of this comely widowed sister, the plot darts off on an entirely foreign trail which unites her to a soldier who has no part in the Conflict, thus excommunicating our expectations and more or less stigmatizing the girl for allowing the old fellow to cherish such sentiments. It turns the trend of story into a vicarious channel which is not sound theatrical stuff. The true handling of this plot would reach its crisis at the old man's disappointment, as in "A Bachelor's Romance," and then turn the tables, eventually marrying him to the beautiful widow. In fact there are no two ways about it, if the audience is allowed to feel that he has earned this reward in shielding the younger brother from actual imprisonment. The audience writes this play. To pervert its normal issue is a violation of dramatic law.

If the above Problem does not indicate a defective spine in this play there is something wrong with your Plot vision. Correct it at once. Try to grasp the action of the first clause upon the second to produce the third. The foregoing does not work out this way. Clause 3 is in no way the product of one and two, but is rather the diametric opposite. This means that all of the wonderful success of "Shavings" is the sole merit of the actors, the characterization and the pull of the novel itself. In other words it might be called the triumph of the book audience of unsophisticated playgoers who come to the theatre with their souls already predramatized.

THE NEW MORALITY.

Sophisticated Highbrow Hurrah.

Harold Chapin would have been a dangerous rival in Dialog if he had survived the late war. His ex-

quisite grasp of the function of woven speech and characterization challenges any veteran of the English stage. But as he excels in the lubrication of language so he miscarries in sustained purpose or Plot. The two extremes seem almost incongruous as qualities of the same pen. His speech is nimble and literary, but his Moral is hazardous and insecure.

Problem.

1. A wife swears at her husband's vamp.
2. She refuses to apologize.
3. He is chastised for open flirtation.

Of course, these clauses are not closely knit. And they do not join even at the most generous construction placed upon their faltering purpose. But a glimpse of the moral intended can be caught. The author aims to say that a wife may condone clandestine infidelity rather than minor passions in public. The highbrows hurrah at this sophisticated guile, but the idea has really no place in the theatre. When a theme is so exquisite that only the perverts and pretenders can get a glimpse of it, it is theatrically spurious and there is no method by which it can be woven into tangible impulse for the composite crowd. And if the crowd cannot pulse it, what chance is there for a play. Mr. Chapin wrote the compressed essence of the moment, but not the sustained purpose of a play.

THE KID.

A Film Flam.

Charles Chaplin started out heroically to write a Third Law play which promised to be one of the best ever done on the screen and finally disintegrated into one of the very worst ever underdone. He involves this Law in a way to reek double ven-

geance on our sympathies by making both the boy and his foster father parental wards of the audience. We feel the pull for both. The man is such a misguided castaway that we immediately assume a Third Law attitude toward him and his parental attachment for the kid is experienced in us by proxy. This dual tension is well conceived but poorly executed.

Problem.

1. A man claims a foundling.
2. A reward is offered for the boy.
3. Theft restores him to his mother.

A trained technician will soon see that there is no coordination in these three clauses. If the child's rescue could in some way lead to the union of mother and man, it would be more logical. The union need not be one of marriage, but could enroll the man as companion to the child under the rich mother's employ. It is strange that some such conclusion did not occur to a clever composer like Chaplin. His creative genius is obvious, but it runs short at the end. Unable to reconcile a marital mating of the two extremes of humanity, he probably conceded the unsatisfactory solution as the only exit. This is distinctly not the case. A hundred solutions are attainable, Charlie; stick to it, next time, till you evolve *One*.


The dream feature of this film is a flivver. It could easily be joined to the play and serve some progressive plot purpose, but as it stands is merely an excrescence of rough-house tomfoolery not particularly clever according to Chaplin standards. Holding the highest rank for originality of screen acting, this great pantomimist should be more chary of desecrating Unity. To start with a consistent

heart story, then lapse into a horse-play fantasy and finally kick in with a non-negotiable ending is endangering the great audience Chaplin has endeared to himself. Wake up, Charles, and do your work even better as you need financial influx less!

KISMET.

A Movie Devoid of Main Motive.

What would you say if you were told that a large Motion Picture corporation had spent a fortune producing a well known stage play and had omitted the cause for a killing which is the chief incentive of Climax? You would think they were daffy. So would we. But in the hustle and jam of building a film of this magnitude, picturing and editing it, this master motive has been overlooked and you are expected to sit through a couple of hours of excellent photography and sumptuous scenery with nothing to stir your dramatic Suspense. When the famous baptismal suicide occurs you are naturally disconcerted for it is a question just how to take such a situation. Should a man gleefully drown a fellow man? Far back in the beginning you have been *told* that this victim's father kidnapped the hero's wife and daughter, or something to that effect. But no adequate preparation for this terrible catastrophe has been pictured on your mind.

The beggar is not properly propelled to his hideous vengeance. The non-essentials of plot are depicted with elaborate detail, but this paramount motive is omitted so far as any dramatized action goes. It is left to mere mention. This may be due to dodging the censor, the ban on visualized kidnapping or some other technical cause, but does this  the photoplaywright? The story should be

started properly. If it is impossible to show the exact incident on the screen some other main motive should be substituted. And if originality fails it would be better to postpone the picture. "Kismet" is a botch as it reels off now.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

Thrills, Chills and Shivers.

Going "The Bat" one better, here is a farce that actually terrifies in its playfulness, although its purpose is just as flimsy. It is not fair to analyze closely on a preliminary road break-in. Our remarks should be taken with that fact in mind. The Dialog is excellent and sustains satisfaction more truly than does the Plot. In the mad rush for chills and shivers, the story flags here and there and at times seems to lack organization. The central purpose is not wrought close enough even for frank farcial standards and this oversight permits some of the emergencies to seem harrowing and disconcerting. But the virtues of the play so far surpass its technical vices that adjustment will be easily attained. And we sincerely hope to see this new Owen Davis work on Broadway next season.

THE BANK ACCOUNT.*

A Stride in Harvard Technic.

This little sketch manifests a decided turn in Harvard technic; a turn toward emotional appeal and actual Scene construction. Howard Brock gives us, at least, something we can experience by proxy in place of the customary figment of the mind which cannot be emotionally masticated. The Dialog, too, is rather good and permits better elocution than the average dramatic club product.

Problem.

1. A husband decides to retire.
2. He finds his fortune a hoax.
3. He resumes the daily grind.

To be sure this is not a thrilling crisis in life, but the playwright has treated it with some skill. By injecting Suspense into the husband's discovery, the author has achieved a certain Little Theater quality which is trying so hard to break into popular favor. At any rate, the play is less literary and more theatric than most specimens of its class. It may indicate a new tendency of English 47 toward technical standards.

* Brentano's, New York, \$1.50.

MRS. PAT AND THE LAW.*

Amateur Motive and Impulse.

Is it any wonder the poor amateur has a hard row to hoe when he attempts to produce a playlet like this and render a reasonable semblance of human life. The skit intends to show the resistance of the lower classes to any force that will yield them better levels of domestic life, but the stage plans and impulses are so loosely wrought that even professional actors could do little with them. The amateur needs all the assistance the best playwright can give him. The burden of patching up lapses in Dialog and characterization should not devolve upon the untrained player. Motive and impulse should be highly geared. Then the amateur has some chance of creating a life-like illusion.

Problem.

1. Mrs. Pat demands her husband's arrest.
2. She is wheedled by his gift of gab.
3. She turns on those who urged her.

It will be seen readily that there is no structural base for a play in this Problem. The biggest theme involved is Mrs. Pat's preference for her own drab plight. At best the Scene could only contribute to other timbers which might construct a play. It is a part and not a whole. The author manifests a sense of humor, but smothers it in cumbersome dialect. She selects a slice of life which most spectators cannot sympathize with and an episode which we cannot readily experience by proxy. Amateur playlets should be made of sterner stuff.

* Little, Brown & Co., Boston, \$3. Published in a book with 27 other one-act plays, entitled "Representative One-Act Plays by American Authors."

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*The Four Seas Company, Boston, \$3.00.

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QUARTERLY

1921

JULY

THE GREEN GODDESS.*

A Critic's Criterion.

Naturally, the greatest event in dramatic annals is a successful play by an accomplished critic. William Archer wrote a great book called "Play-Making." He now proceeds to demonstrate his precepts with a very clever play. It is seldom that the critic turns creator. Mr. Archer has said, himself: "Assuredly, if I had the power, I should write plays instead of writing about them; but one may have a great love for an art without the innate faculty required for actual production." It must indeed be a source of great satisfaction to this master technician to find that the 'innate faculty' is upon him and that his work stands the severest of all tests; an American audience at 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Problem.

1. A mother resists infidelity.
2. She is condemned to death.
3. She is saved by wireless.

The only Archer principle transgressed in this Problem is what the author terms "The Obligatory

Would'nt you say an author who seriously perpetrated such a Conflict had suddenly got the dol-drums? Of course, in this instance she did not seriously intend this monstrosity. The author was so fussed by the sweet music of her own tune-ful words that she thought this sufficed and harped on, oblivious to the discord of her byproduct called drama. If this were not the case the piece would come dangerously near attesting the workings of a deranged mind. The skeleton beneath is harrow-ing. Few beginners are able to see more than the shingles and weatherboards. The framework is visible to the adept only. But whoever Michale Strange is, she certainly knows the shingle industry.

*Stewart Kidd, Cincinnati, \$2.

DEBURA U.*

A Classic Retrogression.

If ordinary prose runs rampant with a nimble pen what won't a stream of poetry do? Granville Barker demonstrates this in his epic of infatuation founded on the French play by Sacha Guitry. He meanders through mazes of disunity and irrelevance merely to gratify his mania for metre. A sober dramatic conscience would be horrified at continuous plot discords. Barker, and possibly, Guitry do not even keep the key. Any character indiscriminately prattles poetry inconsistent with his sphere; and abstract philosophy of sex, off-stage narrative or idle analysis of temperament is indulged in at will. All these discrepancies seem imperceptible to the authors bent on blank verse debauchery.

Problem.

- I. An actor loses his art.
2. He tries to return in vain.
- 3. He trains his son to succeed him.

This is the best the play affords in the way of a near-problem. The only Unity is that of traditional histrionic atmosphere. There is a wealth of stage allusion partly concealed by blank verse. We say concealed advisedly, for to the lazy ear of this generation much remains hidden from mental visibility in lines that are strangely inverted, tinted and timed for poetic effect. Fortunately we have the print to sustain this charge. Read Act III for complete confirmation of every crime in the curriculum.

Act IV is not a bad little one-acter. It departs abruptly from the theme of the other three and utilizes a third-law theme; father and son.

This would probably appeal more forcefully if unhampered by the endless defects of the piece proper. Mr. Belasco has done wonders in mitigating these defects. The enchantress is so bewitching that we forget she is not of the plot for the most part. The acting of the moment usually pays its way. Sometimes the scenery obtrudes and calls attention to the impossibilities rather than the accomplishments of craftsmanship. On the whole the production is a lesson in what not to attempt on the current stage. Literal imitation of Nineteenth century drama leads to little save classic retrogression.

*G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, \$2.

DREAM STREET.

Shredded Emotional Goulashe.

Mr. Griffith has triumphed in this picture only in the art of scrambling detached emotions to a more or less uncertain end. He has surpassed all other attempts to goulashe a series of succeeding assaults on the sensibilities of his spectators eventually emerging in a fairly choate Conflict as follows:

Problem.

- 1. A boy attempts rape.**
- 2. His imbecile brother intercepts.**
- 3. He is regenerated.**

This is merely the terminating story of a thousand and one tangent and needless struggles that frizzle your feelings in this prolonged nightmare dubbed "Dream Street." It could be a powerful sermon if not riddled to shreds with spasmodic subsidiaries. It attempts to tell the current history of nearly every character. The piece is redolent with Mr. Griffith's customary touches of human nature sketched in truly individual style. But these, again would count more incisively if applied to some sustained line of development. The succeeding effects of this great director do not demonstrate any advance in this principle. He should study Unity. It is the last faculty that the artist usually acquires. The present work is a double-barrelled dose of disunity.

THE CITY OF SILENT MEN.

Photoplot With A Mainspring.

Of all the movies we have seen lately we give this one first place not because it represents the profoundest thought but because it attains the highest point of development in its own plot mechanics. And it is a sad but true assertion that most movies fail to MOVE because they muff this full punch of Climax. The audience expects it but their hope is seldom gratified. Here is one notable exception which should serve as a model and inspiration for photoplaywrights who seek the quintessence of gripping Suspense. Whether this element comes from the novel on which the picture is founded or from the

scenarization we are unable to say. But it is there, forcefully forged in the mainspring of Recoil.

Problem.

1. A man is pursued on a false charge.
2. His fingerprints are challenged.
3. He defaces his fingers.

At the beginning of a play structure the mainspring of Plot is not always easy to foresee. For it is the end and not the beginning of the story. It is sometimes the last puzzle in playwriting to yield its answer. Each battle with climax makes the next conquest easier. No matter how hard you sweat and struggle to reach the mountain top it is surely worth the climb. Put all thought of technical surrender out of your mind! There is a Climax to every Conflict. Keep this daring example in mind as a model.

We can hear the highbrows laugh, and pick a hundred holes in this substantial product. The fingers cannot be defaced, they will cry. But these intellectual punctures in no way check the speed of the subconscious vehicle. Sufficient unto the day is as well applied in playwriting as to the philosophy of life. It is not a question of totally obliterating every atom of finger surface. It is enough if you satisfy the hypnotized audience in their homespun dream at its denouement. It is true that the authors tug at the heartstrings a little overtime; but this flaw is a virtue in contrast to the myriads of photoplays that miss the mark. Study this photodrama for its effectiveness and not its defects.

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE.*

A Failure in Film and Flesh.

It is just as easy to ruin the technique of a good actress in the films, apparently, as to desecrate her

stage beauty by the cold camera. Elsie Ferguson was a thing of ravishing beauty in the flesh. The camera has failed to capture this stage radiance. She is neither one thing nor the other in film. For she is neither pretty nor particularly capable.

Problem.

1. A girl deserts her artist husband.
2. She alienates a married man.
2. She reclaims her husband.

This omits some of the essentials of the screen story and departs widely from the published play, but there is no human outline to either. The play was bad enough; the movie is a mongrel. In the natural order of things theatric a poor play should make a good picture. This is not the case with "Sacred and Profane Love." It is a miserable demoralization of a poorly written original. Probably the Bennett subtleties are too bizarre. To attempt translating them into human motives defies the cleverest screen craftsman. To dodge them sends the story hopelessly adrift. The film as a whole fails in power, plot and portraiture.

*Geo. H. Doran, New York, \$1.50

PASSION.

A German Film Spectacle.

Little doubt is left of the competence of foreign playmaking after this magnificent spectacle from the German camera. In acting, actors, mass action and all around portraiture it has little to learn from America. Yankee ideals seem almost catered to in the selection of forms and faces of the principal players. There are no Teutonic types apparent and the feats of performance as well as photographic skill compare favorably with our ablest. From a show-

man's standpoint it may be good business to blind the public to the true nature and origin of the piece. No doubt the average crowd would shun anything they thought at all historic, just as some swarthy swordrattlers might protest if they knew it to be a German product. But it is a pleasure to know that the picture surmounts all obstacles on its net art merits.

THROUGH THE BACK DOOR.

Not A Pickford Picture.

Mary Pickford cannot perpetuate her particular film individuality if she splits plot powers with other feminine characters. In this play the domestic vicissitudes of her mother play far too important a part to permit Mary the opportunity she needs to accent her plaintiff picture personality. A glance at the Problem will illustrate.

Problem

1. A mother unwittingly employs her child.
2. The child averts her mother's divorce.
3. Mother and child are united.

The problem shows what weight of emotional stress is wasted in the parents. The main Conflict is a Third-law drama which derives much of its motive power from the other characters. Most of the Pickfordian episodes are hitched on to the plot rather than woven into the fabric. There are numerous shots of fine photography and stray traits of true Pickford type, but as a whole the picture does not fit the famous star it is designed to foster. An actress of her extreme picture talent should have a plot that capitalizes her individual strength and relies very lightly upon other feminine principals.

THE TRUTH ABOUT HUSBANDS.

Pinero's "The Profligate"* Filmed.

Poor Pinero! If he ever beholds this prostituted picture of his quondam masterpiece he will rue the day he signed movie rights. But despite the ruthless hands that laid hold this drama, here and there the inherent situations have asserted themselves and in crude fashion the skill of the world's greatest dramatist is felt. To be sure, these were Pinero's younger days of melodrama.

Problem.

1. A woman accuses a man of profligacy.
2. Her own husband is the guilty one.
3. She modifies her Puritanic attitude.

If Pinero were to revive this old fashioned play he would doubtless erase the obvious and assign modern motive and competent impulse to every action employed. In the film version the obsolete traits are accented so that the story is weaker than originally written a generation ago. This fault is not common to picture plays. Most directors have learned that the public will not stand for it. Photo-plays are fairly rational in cause and effect. The fear of tampering with the work of a renowned master has doubtless restrained the efforts of the screen adapters. A well built play is not the easiest thing to picturize for this reason. The eminence of the author is a hypnotic handicap.

***Walter H. Baker, Publisher, 50c.**

MADONNAS AND MEN.

Stupendous Promise Broken.

This film starts out with a gigantic scope professing to draw a parallel of the cruelty toward woman in ancient and modern times. It peters out into

a simple third law story of a father's search for his child. This story has one well worked dramatic incident. The author would probably be stunned to know that it is the solitary evidence of dramatic instinct in his entire piece. The incident referred to is the discovery of oil in digging the mother's grave. Nemesis plays a pretty part in this moment. For she provides the funds with which the father may conduct his worldwide search for the daughter. Thus defeating the fiend who caused the mother's death.

Problem.

1. A man seeks vengeance on an old sweetheart.
2. He imprisons her daughter.
3. Her father liberates her.

There is not enough Unity in this photoplay to hold the thing together. It is as antiquated in method and material as any eighteenth century fiction. Its ancient artifice is doubly exaggerated by the use of modern manners. The actors seem to be battling with an impossible fable which is unsuceptible of belief by a current crowd. It can only be witnessed credibly as a curio. Profit by the one spot of Plot integrity; the involuntary providing of the means needed to conquer Evil by Good. An entire plot concocted of like technic would make a marvelous photodrama.

H U S H.

Filmed False Pretense.

Any photoplay which gives promise of a culminating situation and fails to fulfil is not only committing breach of promise but is subconsciously undermining its own end. The heroine of this photoplay after being prosecuted by gossip of infidelity finally declares that she will do something to justi-

fy her husband's misplaced suspicious. And what does she do? She rehearses a home-talent play in a daring costume!

Problem.

1. A woman is persecuted by a supposed past.
2. She resolves to justify this gossip.
3. She does nothing.

So far as the dramatization of this plot goes, the above Problem is adequate. There are other factors in the plot but they are not fundamental. In "The Great Galeoto" by Eschergaray, the same general plan exists. The wife is gossiped into doing the very thing that evil tongues accuse her of having committed illicitly. She eventually marries her husband's best friend vowing that since her friends will have it so she will have it the same and a happy ending is provided by the fact that she now liberates her love for the young man toward whom she had formerly maintained the purest affection. Compare this perfect model of playbuilding with a flabby work like "Hush." The contrast affords a world of technical wisdom.

THE PASSION FLOWER.

Emotional Non-Conductor.

If experts were seeking a non-conductor of human interpretation nothing could be found calculated to insulate composite response more successfully than this film specimen founded on Jacinto Benavente's Spanish play.

Problem.

1. A girl despises her stepfather.
2. He kills her sweetheart.
3. She kisses him passionately.

As will be seen the third clause is the diametric opposite of the motive generated by clauses one and two. This girl would kill rather than kiss this fiend according to natural law. This incongruity does not exceed the inconsistent chain of events which constitute the entire satire. Spectators are called upon to experience sympathetically emotions that are in no way related to the human heart. Even Norma Talmadge cannot lend credence to this arbitrary character. It is a dramatic contradiction.



The stage is passing through a transition. Fads and freak plays have had their day. The world is recovering from a financial upheaval following a world war. Playwriting must of necessity parallel this transition.

The business man is getting down to scientific fundamentals again. So must the dramatist. Caprice is no longer a large factor in commerce nor entertainment. The public wants its money's worth. Have you had an unbiased opinion of your play?

Playwriting Department,

THE DRAMATIST,

Easton, Pa.



October

1921

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THE

DRAMATIST

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THE CIRCLE.*

Triumph of Evil Force.

If there is anything in tradition, Good must prevail in the solution of a play. W. Somerset Maugham adds no laurels to his wreath in this cankered contribution of decadent drama. The disease is doubly contagious owing to its brilliantly disinfected dialog which allows the audience to swallow the germ in a sugar coated conversation. In other words Mr. Maugham deliberately endorses disrupting a good marriage with a very doubtful lark of free love. It is entirely the impulse of the author since he has imbued his characters with no adequate motive for the flight following the disenchanting example of the elders amply illustrated within the boundaries of the Conflict.

Problem.

1. A man's mother elopes with a bachelor.
2. His young wife witnesses the wreckage.
3. She repeats the lark without provocation.

Of course, it can be said that this is true to the ultra fickleness of a certain modern set, but is it the

sort of stigma that needs emphasis in dramatic form? The author has a neat little jest with himself and seems willing to taint his own ideals and those of the audience in order to work out this algebraic satire; X goes wrong therefore Y equals Zero. The Key to Mr. Maugham's innovation in wit may be gleaned from the following:

Elizabeth.

(Stretching out her arms.)

You hateful creature, I absolutely adore you!

Over and over again he springs this antithetic answer even after due technical preparation for the opposite. The play as a whole is antithetical too, ending the adverse of its composite promise.

*George H. Doran Co., New York, \$1.25.

THE CLAW.

Bernstein's Early Product.

Only a gifted actor like Lionel Barrymore dare attempt a tragedy these days and it is not always a safe bet even as a vehicle for a star. "La Griffe" is probably named for the clutch of infatuation a young girl holds over an editor of great ability, high repute and commanding position. She leads him into a life of luxury beyond his means and eventually destroys him mentally, morally, and bodily. After the jig is up she berates and forsakes him and he sinks in demented senility. This is a great score for the actor but is it a play for Americans?

Problem.

1. A man is infatuated with a girl.
2. She degrades and impoverishes him.
3. When demented she forsakes him.

The Conflict of this play consumes itself with the girl's gradual assumption of authority in his home, his office and his personal integrity. This besotted infatuation is consummated in a gibbering dementia which portrays the penultimate of physical and mental disintegration. It is an analysis of the sapping of clean character rather than the dramatization of the forces that usually go to make up a Plot. But this is often the secret of good manuscript for a skilled player. There is an audience for such performances and it is possible Lionel Barrymore may find this selected few in sufficient numbers to run a fair season. But is it an American model? "The Red Robe" did not prove so. As a rule a hopeless finale is inconsistent with optimistic American ideals.

POT LUCK.

An Unprepared Repast.

To the veteran technician the pertinent point in this product is its incomplete state. The plot abounds in highly marketable materials but these take on more than a fair share of improbability for lack of matured building. The Conflict as a whole is not firmly conceived and its integral parts are flimsy and half finished. In other words it has been rushed to market long before its framework is finished. In this regard its title applies: "Pot Luck."

Problem.

1. A girl weds a crook.
2. His pal tries to blackmail them.
3. She outwits the pal.

There are so many possibilities of decided success in this new and original phase of the crook

drama that it seems cruel to neglect it as Edward Childs Carpenter has done. Plausibility can be gained by merely listening to the dictates of the characters he has half created and drawing bolder the strokes he has hastily sketched. In fact the play seems like an author's preliminary rehearsal where the puppets of his plot are paraded before his fancy for final balance and trim. The first thought of the amateur would let this beautiful girl advertise for a husband, but the adept would soon discard this vapid device. The chance sight of a matrimonial newspaper should not suggest the thing and allow it all to elapse between acts. This delays everything.

The empty first act should be filled with the actual happening of this husband hunting adventure. The Problem is unable to get under way and the beloved crooks are postponed until the second act. It is much the same with the literary genius and seafaring knowledge assumed by Steve. These are daubed on with a dull brush, but again this is a phase of unfinished workmanship which could easily be corrected by proper methods of revise and revise. The day is fast dawning when producers will not risk these halfbaked biscuits for the stage is swiftly returning to normal demand and supply where the excess profits of the playgoer cease to afford a place for unprepared plays. At the peak of prosperity any old value satisfied. Now the audience was two dollars' worth for one.

OTHER LIVES.

The Reel and the Real Drama.

The influence of the reel drama upon the real drama is felt in many ways. The break-in perfor-

mances of this play brought unexpected applause to the actor who happened to be known to the film fans. The plot itself steals the cut-back methods from the films and goes zig-zagging back and forth violating play Sequence but again gratifying the film fans. If this novelty were new it might get by on its innovation but "On Trial" pretty well exhausted the fad and the authors of "Other Lives" will probably abandon this device before it gets to Broadway.

Problem.

1. A wife refuses a divorce.
2. Her innocent rival is reported a suicide.
3. The divorce is consented to.

This is an excellent sermon on mismated marriage but the motion picture process emphasizes the leap frog novelty rather than its dramatic power. Played in valid Sequence the Conflict could be ten times more tense and tensity is the evident intent of the authors. The soul of drama is the DOING and the corpse is the has-been done. And even should mechanics catch up with the camera and present glimpses from the past with a flickering speed, there would be no legitimate gain. The narrative process is one thing and true dramatization is quite another. Theresa Helburn and Edward Goodman have doubtless learned this lesson at great cost of revision and despair.

THE AFFAIRS OF ANATOL.

Rakishness in the Guise of Reform.

This is a much overrated picture not free from flagrant technical flaws and great only in its good

luck of getting by the censor with near-vice propaganda put up in reform packages. It slyly creates a distaste for marital virtue and coyly scouts the function of reform. Such pictures are a strong argument in favor of censorship but not the sort of censorship that passes upon such pictures. The Pennsylvania board may have erased some of its salacity, but it certainly did not put in any of the unexpurgated remainder.

Problem.

1. A man philanders with other women.
2. His wife plays the same game.
3. He tests her purity by hypnotism.

This is not the strict construction of "The Affairs of Anatol" but it will show the decomposed trend as well as any of the hundred and one symptoms that drift to the surface. There is no plot to it. The whole contrivance is a device to set certain psychologic impurities before the public in a way that defies the censor and gratifies the lower instincts of a civilized crowd. Let us examine into the success of this putrifying process.

At the height of the play's puerility where the boob husband has gone off with a show girl on a threat to avenge his wife, we find the greatest gap in technic. The show girl is flirting for a three thousand dollar loan with which to pay for her husband's hospital bill. It is the evident intent of the picture at this point to hint that she will sell herself to Anatol for the favor of this loan. But the crisis passes, the operation is completed and the girl, supposed to be honestly solicitous of her husband's critical condition, calmly resumes traffic for the

loan which is no longer a case of life and death. She might just as well owe this money to the surgeon as to Anatol; hence, it is the authors and not the motives of the puppets who sustain this lascivious scene. Schnitzler is bad enough in his original Hungarian goolash of morals but the movie experts have gone above and below his continental iniquity. There is a quiet undertow of resentment brewing that will soon boil up and sterilize these poisonous photoplays.

A TRIP TO PARADISE.

Better Signs in Filmwrighting.

Once in a while there arises a new promise of more perfect picturing together with better substance in filmwrighting. Here is one of the hopefuls. It might be called the film sister to "Liliom," a current stage success. The hero goes to heaven, while under the influence of ether, to receive his verdict on continued terrestrial existence and obtains a new lease on life by reason of his earthly record. The next-world photography is magnificent. It is to be hoped that these are signs of the times and that the motion picture industry is going to follow the trend of all intelligent business enterprises giving more for your money. The Metro is to be commended for this long leap in that direction.

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THE GRAND DUKE.

Adolescent Instincts Dramatized.

Mr. Belasco has evidently been betrayed by the moral collapse of the hour into producing something even worse than current sophisticated vulgarity for he dabbles with the awakening impulses of sex desire in youth, to no plot purpose. In other words "The Grand Duke" in attempting to be blase and fastidious merely gnaws maliciously at the vital ideals which centuries of civilization have striven to establish. It is difficult to believe that a prevailing slump in stage taste could blind Mr. Belasco to the viciousness of such a play. It may be that his eagerness to provide his star with a bizarre role subjugated his sagacity.

Problem.

1. A roue wins a woman with a kiss.
2. Their bastard son employs the same tactics.
3. He wins a wealthy bride.

This play revels in abstract passions and sexual impulses stripping off the tattered veil of stage modesty, sentiment and decency from virgins and degenerates alike. It reflects the decay of current

manners and customs multiplied a hundredfold. It is one of the first American productions dealing with the desecration of the Third Law of Nature; Parent and Child. Heretofore this relationship has been held inviolate in the theatre and it is a pity that so mighty a man as Belasco is the first to sully its sacred bonds. There must be some mistake, as we have already intimated. The pernicious psychology of the piece has not evidently percolated. And we, for one, would feel gratified to have this great master admit his outrage of the ethics of the theatre.

THE LAW BREAKER.

Crook Reform Psychology.

It is unfair to analyse a play in process save as a break-in experiment and we are dissecting the above purely from that standpoint. This phase is intensely interesting to the student. It shows how much faith a producer puts in a notion that appeals to his instincts despite minor disparagements. "The Law Breaker" is often intangible in spots, and the auditor gropes in dismay for a meaning. But the underlying theme is ambitious and will win a hearing if certain feeble ingredients are eliminated and rational motives installed where abstract theories now prevail.

Problem.

1. A girl touches a crook's conscience.
2. His loyalty turns to true affection.
3. Her theories also yield to love.

Here is no mean Problem of criminology. The author conceived well enough but failed in the courage of his convictions. His Problem stipulates one thing and he substitutes another. He allows the wealthy reformer to resign her hobby just at the moment of conquest. He permits the crook to go

back to his former love. This may be good reason; but the transcendent demands of the audience must hold sway. Drama is dominated by emotion. There is the fundamental error in Mr. Goodman's structure. He defies the sovereignty of the audience.

Lesser difficulties beset the play from beginning to end. It should be in three acts, not four; repeated leads should be eradicated, the girl reformer consistently characterized, and the entire product could be lifted up to the high promise held by the first act. The crook played by John Cromwell is the best attainment of the play and the playing. It is such a high standard that consequent laps and flaws are unduly conspicuous by comparison.

THE WHITE PEACOCK.

A Play of Great Promise.

The technical attributes of a play should interest the earnest student because it is only by technic that art may advance. Mme. Petrova offers high evidences of skill in this first hearing, both as a craftsman and as an expert fitting herself with a role best calculated to sell her histrionic wares to advantage. To anyone not taking this last point into consideration, the material of "The White Peacock" might seem a bit creepy, but the author has in mind a sumptuous frame for the screen-stage actress.

Problem.

1. A husband falsely condemns a man.
2. His wife falls in love with the victim.
3. The husband meets his poetic doom.

The bloodcurdling fandangos of this plot are very tastefully treated and should not be allowed to weigh against its inherent merits. This is the key

in which it is composed. The mood is consistently sustained but the plot properties are not as closely adhered to as might be. For instance, the fact that the refugee comes to this woman's bedchamber with vengeance in his heart is not clearly established. Bizzaare treatment runs away with some scenes at the expense of Plot facts. If the above Problem firmly supported this gorgeous superstructure, the furbalows would be quickly assimilated and most of the superficial criticisms that assailed the details and ignored the true faults would vanish. We hope Mme. Petrova will not let these leaky walls dissuade her from further effort in an art she is so amply fitted to flourish.

HER SALARY MAN.

An Antique Farcically.

If ever the plumb line of Problem were needed it certainly advertised its absence in this recent farce, of great promise in Act I, complete collapse in Act II, and happy relapse after a mere fluke of luck in III. Had the author been able to size up his work as a whole, instead of blindly groping from incident to incident, he might have measured its main dimensions by means of its Problem and thus maintained a uniform tensivity of interest.

Problem.

1. A girl buys a poor husband.
2. He turns out a millionaire.
3. She is reconciled to his riches.

Although entirely fictitious, this first premise is a good one for pyramiding nonsense. The second clause offers a great cloudburst of surprise but is muffed in the dialog with endless chatter about Mexico which has no bearing on the plot. The third

clause should show a reconciliation, even though both are rich, but is replaced by an elderly lady's undress event which gathers in an avalanche of laughs, nevertheless. Mr. Rutherford has written more negotiable lines than enter the average Broadway product. It is too bad that he could not combine these with his several grotesque situations and save what is now squandered on an ill formed frame.

OTHER LIVES.

The Reel and the Real Dream.

The influence of the reel drama upon the real drama is felt in many ways. The break-in performances of this play brought unexpected applause to the actor who happened to be known to the film fans. The plot itself steals the cut-back methods from the films and goes zig-zagging back and forth violating play Sequence but again gratifying the film fans. If this novelty were new it might get by on its innovation but "On Trial" pretty well exhausted the fad and the authors of "Other Lives" will probably abandon this device before it gets to Broadway.

Problem.

1. A wife declines a divorce.
2. Her innocent rival is reported a suicide.
3. The divorce is conceded.

This is an excellent sermon on mismated marriage but the motion picture process emphasizes a leap frog novelty rather than any particular power. Played in valid Sequence the Conflict could be ten times more tense and tensity is the evident quest of the authors. The soul of drama is the DOING and the corpse is the has-been-done. And even should mechanics catch up with the camera and present

glimpses from the past with a flicker it would be no legitimate gain. The naïveté is one thing and true dramatization is another. It is a difference between the quick and the dead. Theresa Helburn and Edward Goodman have learned this lesson at great cost and in great despair, and if the play reaches Broadway it will doubtless play in proper Season.

THE SKIRT.

A Cow-girl Farce.

Another play in-the-making is being put on the road as a vehicle for Bessie Barriscale, film actress. Plots for this purpose are being made to appraise for the reason that the actress, which follows their favorite from the stage is already half hypnotized and the minimum effect perpetrated by the moviegoer what might seem frivolous to the veteran film-goer looms up as logical entertainment to the film-ized friends of the actress.

Problem.

1. A girl masquerades as a cowboy.
2. She is initiated with a will.
3. She fools no one but herself.

This is a slender thread to string a farce on and the author will doubtless find this out before he strikes Broadway. There are numerous opportunities for fun and situations that give Miss Barriscale splendid moments for her peculiar histrionic possibilities. But these are not woven into a fabric that holds together as the above Problem signifies. It may take a stronger hand than Howard Hickman's to mold this material into shape but the outlines are

given for a play that might prove highly satisfactory to the host of fans already booming Barriscale.

DEAR ME.

A Literary Masterpiece.

The literary quality of a play (if there is such a thing) must be that original concept which the authors form out of old images so combined as to create a new slice of dramatic experience in the heart of the beholder. The literary critic would be the last to detect this merit for he is looking for the effect it will have on the next generation and the readers of the printed page. He cannot leave his book reading tendency at home when he goes to the theatre. He judges not by the composite emotional response but by his intellectual dissection.

Problem.

1. A man finds a home for failures.
2. He rehabilitates their callings.
3. He marries the product.

Here is one of the plots of personality which you should file away with your dramatic treasures like the unforgettable souls you find in unsuspected bodies. It is not only original, it has a wholesome regenerating psychology which is bound to wield its power over a properly dramatized public and so achieve the highest purpose of the theatre—auto-suggestion. Added to these virtues is a delicate charm which frames the fascinating Grace La Rue in a wholly captivating picture. Could anyone ask that this exquisite script be embalmed merely to make it literature? Surely not. Drama is the here and now, not the hereafter!

SMILIN' THROUGH.

Jane Cowl Incarnate.

After following the devious ways of an arbitrary author through miles and miles of unnecessary dismay there must be something well worth while about the play or the player if you still carry out of the theatre a benign and grateful attitude toward them both. This is the paramount feeling after a night with "Smilin' Through." The cumbersome method of telling the fable gets on your nerves and the TALK-TALK-TALK of the elder characters seem to retard the progress but with it all you are so enchanted with Miss Cowl's death and reincarnation that you retain only the favorable impressions.

Problem.

1. A man offends his wife's spirit.
2. She suspends her ghostly visitations.
3. He repents and she escorts him heavenward.

This is one of the many possible plots in "Smilin' Through." There are feuds and enmities of highly fictitious sorts but the paramount art in the piece is the above Problem. Moods, whims and legends make up the bulk of the text and these merge well with the spiritualistic character of the plot. Technically there is little fine work. The Dialog is good in spots and the weird atmosphere and quaint customs are well woven, but the real triumph is one of staging, not of technic. The star, also contributes her half.

THE HARP OF LIFE.*

A Big Suspense Builder.

The greatest technical value in this play is its generation of Suspense out of highly trivial materials. This reaches its height in Act II. It is a

queer selection of emotional fabric and shows the author's quick assessment of climactic values. If told the ingredients in advance of seeing the play you would say Suspense could not be generated from them. The situation of a mother meeting the siren who has lured away her son sounds rather tame in contemplation but Mr. Manners has manipulated this moment with great skill. If he fails to fulfill, after promising such spontaneous combustion, it does not necessarily minimize the merit of his approach to the crisis.

Problem.

1. A boy has been raised a pet.
2. He falls in love with a harlot.
3. His mother wins her off.

If the last clause of this Problem were as deftly handled as the second, "The Harp of Life" would go far toward restoring its author to the prestige won by his "Peg o' My Heart." The people of this play are a much higher grade, in fact. In the first Act their niceties are so far-fetched and their customs so remote from the composite crowd that they smack of idle aristocracy and decay. But this may be the author's secret device, to create a boy so effeminate that his virginity might stir just as much solicitude in the mother's breast as a wayward daughter. This play might well be called the "Daughter-son." At the expense of a fallow first act the author creates a strong second and then fritters away a magnificent third, after a courageous start.

*George H. Doran Co., New York, \$1.25.

GOLD*

The Truth of O'Neil's Technic.

Just what virtue there is in O'Neil's playwriting is difficult to determine but there is a virtue and it is of

sufficient heat to turn the heads of his critics if not the hearts of his hearers. In other words O'Neil has gone a long way toward successful theatrical publicity but a short way toward technical achievement. What he does not know of Dramatology far outweighs his native talent. At best he is an excellent amateur. A glance at this Problem illustrates one of his chief deficits; founding a Conflict on a fallacy.

1. A whaler discovers a chest of brass.
2. The author makes him think it is gold.
3. He goes mad and refutes the author's error.

Do you get the full force of this delusion? It is wholly the author's hallucination. He not only makes the madman think the junk is gold but he forces the false motive into the breast of three other cunning seadogs. And this pseudo-deception is the basis of the play. It is not a fairy play but presented to us as an honest-to-goodness Plot worthy of three hours' attendance in the playhouse. It would be dramatic treason on the part of this Journal to admit such parsiflage is playwriting. To pursue such makeshift will drive any author to dementia, to madness just as inevitable as the insanity so cleverly depicted in the Captain of his play. It is a crime for critics to commend this jargon! It is not only betraying the public whom they are supposed to inform, but it is misleading a play maker who possesses a marked degree of efficiency in one department of drama; the drawing of stage character or acting parts.

No doubt this ability is an inherited gift. O'Neil's father was a famous actor and impressed on the boy the necessity of a part. This is ONE of the many elements that go toward making a play—but only

ONE. Too much of this solitary segement or the total subjugation of all other ingredients may mar the completed output just as ultimately as the absence of this one. On the other hand the basis of credulity for the crowd is by far a more requisite fundamental in playwriting for without it you are writing merely a part and not a play.

Most of the other nine cardinal principles of playwriting are delinquent in O'Neil's craftsmanship. Many, many of his points are undramatized. He plumps them in. Instead of investing his character with motive or impulse to project certain bits he recites them and thus makes chatter of speeches that should be dialogue. He alludes continually to items that have not been properly planted in the text. He takes for granted beliefs that are not conducive to proxy experience by the composite crowd. He repeatedly confuses **DRAMA**, which is the *doing*, with **Fiction**, which is the **TELLING**. He has as yet little or no knowledge of dividing his materials into Acts so that vital incidents may **HAPPEN** on stage and not be reported to the Scene.

What a snap playwriting would be if its laws could be so transgressed! But there is no escape. **Technic** is the science of **AUDIENCE** and to successfully entertain the crowd we must all supinely serve its mandates. Mr. O'Neil is appealing to the few unmerged by mass psychology. The morbid, the pathologic or the clinical may make an excellent acting role but they need many other supporting parts in Drama's great cast of characters. Mr. O'Neil must master these principles just as honestly as anybody else.

*Boni & Liveright, New York, \$1.50.

SCHOOL DAYS.**Film of Childhood Fun.**

Here is a photoplay given over entirely to the fun and pathos of school day romance. It seems incredible to expect a boy actor to entertain you for seven reels of "kid stuff," but the authors of this picture have found the pathway to eternal youth in poetic retrospect. For we live over again the scenes of our childhood through sympathetic proxy in this youngster's plight.

Problem.

1. A foundling inherits a fortune.
2. He is shown the deceits of city life.
3. He returns to rustic truths.

This is the loftier lesson in "School Days" and it is learned from pages of actual life pictured with infinite patience. In most "kid" pictures the pathos is only skin deep, but in the acting of Wesley Barry, the shivers go clean to the bone. The picture approaches the ideal in so far as it has captured the evanescent echoes of youth so dear to the hearts of humanity. In this sense the work is a masterpiece.

If we were compelled to desecrate these remarks with candid criticism, the worst we could do is to caution producers against mixing the sophistication of adult fun with the humor of adolescence. Fortunately, most of these gaps will escape the average spectator, though they may leave a subconscious impression that the man from the theatre has been meddling with our world of human nature. This applies to the high finance offshoot hooked on for the sake of a fat sandwich.

THEODORA.**An Italian Attempt at Filming.**

No nation seems to hold a monopoly on mass photography nor mob spectacles. The Germans and Italians seem to do it equally well using American pioneers as models. But when this is said, there is little left to be commended in "Theodora" except some splendid portraiture, particularly of the title part, and numerous shots of expansive architecture. The picture as a play remains an Italian conundrum. It is not interpreted, if, indeed, there is anything worthy of translation in the original. It hardly seems that there might be, for it is hardly reasonable that the American producers would dissipate story values.

Problem.

1. An empress betrays her love to obtain evidence.
2. The emperor suspects her fidelity.
3. He beheads her after she poisons her lover.

If this is not the true plot of the photoplay it is substantial testimony against any lucid meaning that might be deduced from the picture. It is a monumental blunder so far as sense is concerned. Nothing comes across clearly. There is a long succession of unmotivated events which now and then thrill, but do not connect in one sustained chain of related happenings. As a whole they mean nothing and as disjointed episodes they harass the imagination of the spectator. There is a terrific lapse somewhere, but without knowing more about the original intent and the processes of editing and alteration, it would be hard to trace the technical transgression.

BLOOD AND SAND.

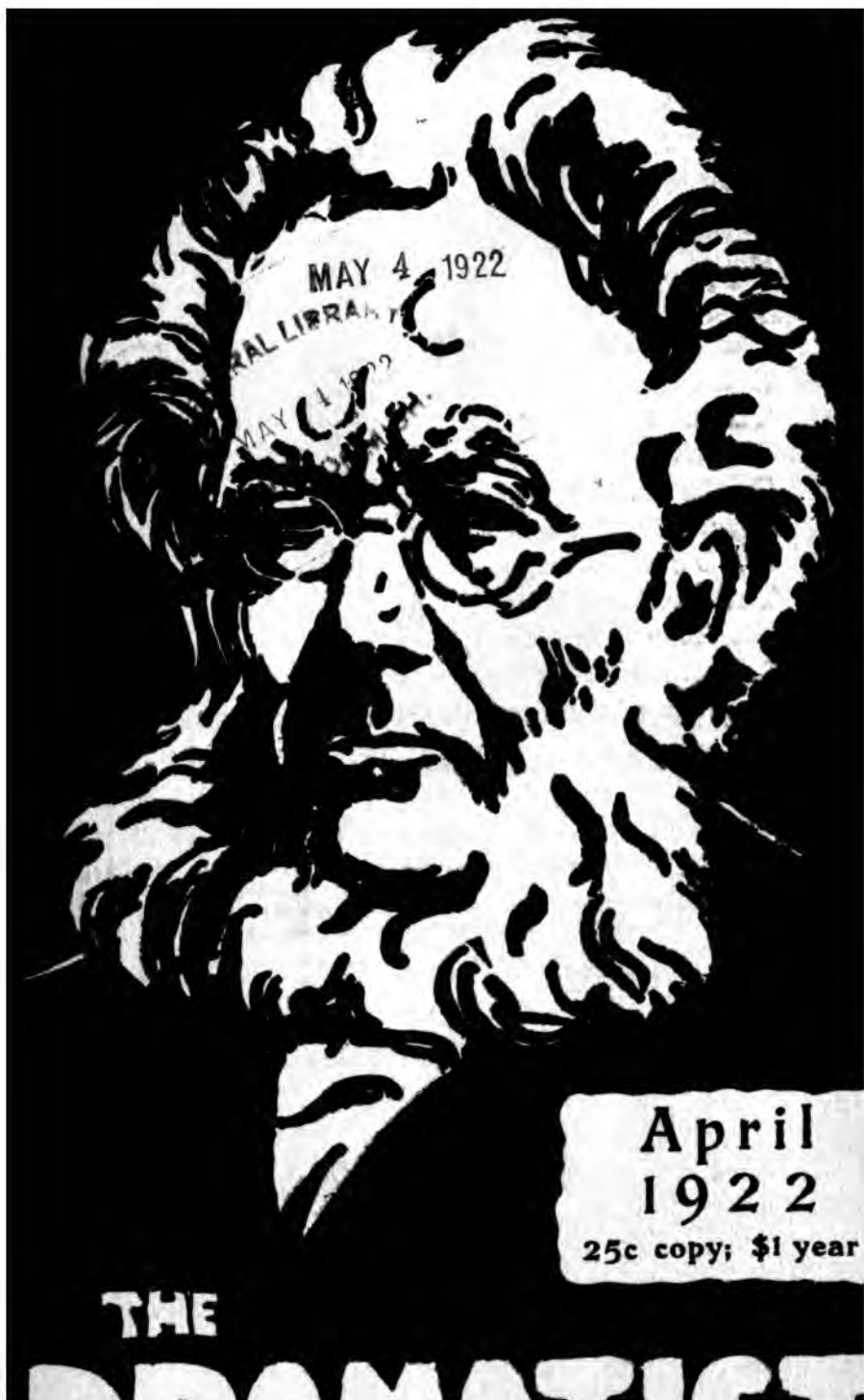
Half Dramatized Fiction.

The usual result of trying to put a prosperous novel into play form is a half and half compromise. The adaptor feels disposed to preserve interesting chapters from the book and if he is not a thorough dramatist, the prose version prevails. It is a rare mind that has the perception to detect the dramatic fibre back of it all and not be hypnotized by the individual appeal the book has first made to him. Tom Cushing has not qualified in the present attempt.

Problem.

1. A toreador is bewitched by a vamp.
2. She throws him over.
3. His mastery of the bull is devitalized.

If this were the germ of Plot intended by the novelist, the only way to preserve it is to select a Sequence of Scenes that may mature such a Problem. This would soon rid the play of excrescences like the third act where most of the time is consumed with a broken leg which has no place whatever in the Plot skeleton. It would dictate the creation of scenes wherein the toreador's carousal with the vamp would be seen and not heard, and the wife's discovery of his infidelity visualized rather than relegated to gossip. In other words, the first step in reconstructing a novel should be an architectural rendering of the main shafts of structure. The rest can be written by a mere playwright.



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LUTHER B. ANTHONY, Editor

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QUARTERLY

1922

APRIL

THE TRUTH ABOUT BLAYDS.

Not a Dramatic Composition.

This play cannot be called dramatic in structure unless the things that do not involve the emotions are dramatic. When a Conflict misses the emotions the play must inevitably be one of character study rather than universal interest. And this is evidently the purpose of the present piece; to analyse the eccentricities of a crochety old man who has concealed from the world his life secret and lets the truth be known at the crisis chosen for the era of this play.

Problem.

- 1. A famous poet confesses to fraud.**
- 2. His family is about to expose the forgery.**
- 3. The real writer wills him the verse.**

It will be seen at a glance that the composite emotions are not concerned. This is purely a mental grip, similar to the rapid fire patter of vaudeville or the super sensations of George Shaw. There always have been and will be speeches written for actors by men who probably could not write lines of dramatic

composition to save their souls. This neither condemns the one nor exalts the other. But it does define the difference between drama and histrionic rhetoric, between an experience by proxy and a recited tale. The one is addressed to the conscious the other to the subconscious mind. The one is a cleverly knit story, the other is a deftly woven and projected dream. Do not confuse the two forms. This journal deals in DRAMA.

KIKI.

Neither Fish nor Fowl.

As the strongest pulling play in New York to-day, "Kiki" is not flattering testimony to the development of the American drama. It is neither one thing nor another; neither a well built play nor a well wrought character study. The dramatic form is not employed continually and the fragments of characterization frequently flag. The story staggers around helplessly having no definite purpose, no beginning and no end. It is neither fish nor fowl.

Problem.

1. A girl repels a husband's undivided affections.
2. His wife tries to reclaim him.
3. The girl intervenes.

This Problem does not hold water. Neither does the plot. If there is any rhyme or reason in the entire fabrication we are unable to detect it. Its only excuse for reproduction seems to be an exhibition of intimate domestic relations which finer sensibilities judiciously suppress. Privacies of life are let off at all angles whether competent to the plot or no. Kiki's supposed prostitution comes in

for most of the laughter and after the sex hounds have had a headful, the author deliberately refutes the facts he has shown. Kiki has all the signs but not the sins. She is a caricature of chastity, a virgin child of the streets cartooned to create a clever curtain.

THE DEMI-VIRGIN.

Disorganized Obliquity.

The amazing part about this play is not its far-famed immodesty but the utter prostitution of organized playwriting principle. We can see how an author could put it over if the thing were primed with wit and audacity, but it is not easy to fathom how a showman of Mr. Woods' sagacity would permit such a banal exhibit in his name. The things that seem vulgar might be exquisite art if properly placed and impulsed. The Scenes that are sensual lust might become liberal literature if impelled by dramatic cause and effect.

Problem.

1. A divorcee charges infidelity.
2. She flirts with her ex-husband to prove it.
3. This leads to reconciliation.

The thread of this story is obviously light as down. It is not strong enough to support the play. It was intentionally written for some other reason. And the other reason being sexual and not dramatic the underlying Problem should be all the more stable to sustain the extraneous increment. It harks back to the same author's "Nobody's Widow"* which

likewise dwelt on the details of the marital relation unfit for the auditor not steeped in impropriety. But as we said in that criticism: "Such sensualism would not come within the province of the analyst's pen were it a legitimate outcome of the play premises, but being a spurious factor it invites censure."

Why is the pollution in this play spurious? Because it is manufactured by the wife's seduction of the husband to expose his liscentiousness and avert his marriage to a friend. Her motivation is so flimsy that it merely photographs the author's iniquity. He prostitutes himself, his producer, his art, and his audience. At no moment in the play do the characters emit filth from their own impulse. It is invariably the vulgarity of the author and it "ain't as if the poor fellow needed the tainted royalties!"

Mr. Hopwood is just as raw and obscene here as he was innocent and artistic in "Fair and Warmer." And there is no better comparison to show how the one might be regenerated upon the pattern of the other. It is a crime to retrogress. We trust that Mr. Woods may be made to look at it from this angle; that he has been stung by the shoddy output of a clever author. This is the dominant dramatic crime in "The Demi-Virgin."

*Page 131, Jan., 1911, issue of *The Dramatist*.



BROKEN BRANCHES.**Translated Transplantation.**

The evils of translating a transplanted drama are flagrantly manifest in this much mutilated Yiddish goolash of Hungarish origin. Even an English dialog fails to erase the provincial traditions and customs of the peasantry. The spirit of the piece remains foreign and its appeal is as maudlin as "Over the Hills." In this instance it is a brow-beaten father instead of a downtrodden mother.

Problem.

1. A father gives his fortune to his children.
2. They plan to oust him from the home.
3. He revises his will.

Even the theme of this play is foreign. There is nothing American about it. There is a tinge of sincerity lurking about the idea somewhere but it is never quite captured and controlled by the limping Conflict. The authors do not seem certain of what they want to do but are lured here and there by vain striving for effects or by the desire to retain good moments in one or more of the original plays from which their product is obviously extracted. These moments, for the most part are highly extraneous, and hence the shambles of isolated incidents shattering whatever Unity the new compilation contains.



UP THE LADDER.**An Owen Davis Drama.**

It is a rare treat nowadays to go into the theatre and be swept along in the current of the author's emotional stream of Conflict into the whirlpool of Climax toward which you have felt yourself hurled from the first. Whether you like or dislike the dramatist's particular subject is a matter of taste. But if you do not appreciate the good method of construction you are oblivious to the brightest signs of evolution in the greatest of all arts—**DRAMA.**

Problem.

1. A magnate seeks a married woman.
2. He subjects the husband by trickery.
3. The husband retaliates in the same coin.

Here is an excellent example of the Recoil principle where Nemesis visits the retribution of the evil doer upon his own head. The magnate compels the husband to employ certain unfair methods to gain a point and the latter turns the tables on his persecutor when the day of reckoning arrives. This is invariably the highest notch of satisfaction an audience can experience all pussyfoot critics to the contrary. It is easy to deride this archaic principle in playwriting and the other course is much simpler to pursue. Any amateur can undertake an art without the science of it. But the instincts of a veteran like Davis tell the truth when they hold out for the old fashioned form. The thing is primitive we'll all admit, but so is emotion. Let the faddist fabricators attempt such a feat. They will soon discern reasons for adopting the undramatized drama.

Please do not accept this tribute as an unqualified endorsement of all this play contains. There are minor flaws in its technic and not a few in its taste. But these are surely well within the limits set by the theatre, the public, the censors and the fiction literature of the day. A little closer pursuit of technic could easily eradicate these moral flaws but the play as a whole teems with clever craftsmanship and inalienable earmarks of the master.

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS AND DRAMA.

Dream Fabrics.

The theory that most dreams spring from the suppressed inner thoughts which conventionalism forbids us to utter, makes psycho-analysis a closely related and highly important study of the dramatist. For a play is a thing that dreams are made of or putting it the other way, a dream is a thing that plays are made into. Few of us would care to have our innermost thoughts revealed to the world but we enjoy seeing that other self spread upon the stage in proxy experience. The analyst tells us that these suppressed half conscious thoughts are the things that become our dreams and the true dramatist releases these sublimated impulses in his play persons thus keeping pace with the psychic being in us, which is always about ninety per cent submerged.

Isn't it this fact that gives us great delight in the theatre? Mind you, the release is not made voluntarily by way of monolog and soliloquy. That is always an artificial code which we forgive in vaudeville as part of a clown type of entertainment. But the real dramatist conceals his curtain even while he draws it aside and reveals the submerged

undertow of thought. He employs the subtle interplay of dialog inference and character. It is never necessary to have the puppet blab his secret thoughts. This is antique art. There are a thousand and one ways by which these inmost murmurs may be conveyed indirectly concealing the truth just as cunningly as we mortals do who cling desperately to the ninety per cent home-brew ruminations that are constantly haunting our hearts.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE.

Genius Surmounts Prejudice.

No sooner do the magnates proclaim a prejudice against war pictures than a genius arises who surmounts it with a superhuman idea. Ibanez paints a picture of Fate that etches its story deep under the skin and finally pierces the soul. He is not limited by personal vision nor national view but employs a universal motif. He peers back of the puppets that portray his parts and gives us a glimpse of the eternal forces striving for good and abolishing evil; striking down hatred and fostering love.

He takes these forces from the last book of the New Testament and they are called, Conquest, War, Pestilence and Death. These are the four horsemen who ride merrily over the mute masses of humanity in their symbolic crusade against hate. It is this loftier moral that magnetizes. The camera has caught the author's intent with masterful skill and lavish expenditure and the result is a colossal spectacle with moments of finer individual emotion and tense dramatic interest.

Problem.

1. A wife loves a slacker.
2. Her husband is blinded at war.
3. Patriotism impels her repentance.

This Problem shows the human text of the photoplay. It is not entirely wholesome, but again, it uses evil to evolve good. The audience is not allowed to revel in the infidelity. The Moral is given a decisive lift. Patriotism claims the wife, and her example rehabilitates the boy and the blinded husband regains the dutiful care of his penitent young wife.

These things are accomplished in a rather roughshod way but the Conflict is permitted to create its characters and the world war is employed in a way to make a veritable cataclysm of Conflict. There is more Unity and continuity than in most mammoth pictures and life is played with a broader scope and keener vision. For sublime purpose, "The Four Horsemen" dominates all film dramas to date.

THE PASSION FLOWER.

Emotional Movie Non-Conductor.

If experts were seeking a non-conductor of human interpretation nothing could be found calculated to insulate composite response more successfully than this film specimen founded on Jacinto Benavante's Spanish play.

Problem.

1. A girl despises her stepfather.
2. He kills her sweetheart.
3. She kisses him passionately.

As will be seen the third clause is the diametric opposition of the motive generated by clauses one and two. This girl would kill rather than kiss this fiend according to natural law. This incongruity does not exceed the inconsistent chain of events which constitute the entire story. Spectators are called upon to experience sympathetically emotions which are in no way adjusted to the human heart. Even Norman Talmadge cannot lend credence to this arbitrary cartoon. It is a dramatic contradictory paradox.

WELCOME STRANGER.

Strong Play on Sympathy.

There are few plays dedicated so decidedly to racial appeal or propaganda that have enough universal conviction to win the general public. This plot weaves a highly theatric story of the persecution of the Jew but in no way eliminates the sympathy of the average Gentile. Its shrewd craftsmanship fascinates all alike.

Problem.

1. A Jew invades a Gentile village.
2. A disguised Jew incites persecution.
3. His exposure annuls prejudice.

The fact that one of his own race turns out to be the leader of the persecutors is one of the truest teachings of the play. And it goes a long way toward allaying the prejudice that lies in wait for such a plot. Mr. Hoffman has slain this opposition and preached a good sermon at one cunning stroke. The interracial hatred of the Hebrew is venomous when ~~it~~ **it** is mollified and by confessing this frailty the author im-

mediately prevents a one-sided plea. He is just as truthful in making the hero's staunchest friend a Gentile. Both points in this particular are the loftiest visions Mr. Hoffman has had.

A vast background of vaudeville intelligence comes handy in writing for the sober stage. Mr. Hoffman plies all his old tools with telling deftness in the broader field. These threadbare tricks are not to be despised. They are truly the traditions of the theatre and to be able to use them is the art of the adept. To ignore them is likely to spell the apathy of the amateur. Study this beautiful bouquet of hokum with all the reverence of a devout botanist.

A DOLL'S HOUSE REFILMED.

Nazimova Nullifies Nora.

The second filming of "A Doll's House" is no improvement over an earlier Artcraft* edition. Nazimova does not bring her stage talents to the screen with any equivalent value. This may be the photographer's fault, for the object we see is far from fascinating. Miss Ferguson is likewise blighted by the lense but appears a much less distressing creature as Nora. Nazimova seems to have but one or two patent snoots which she grimaces again and again. It does seem that the director might have caught these blemishes and effaced them with one device or another. Diffused focus does not help her. Her face seldom pictures the emotion intended and the affected phiz bears little relation to the human species.

Each film of this great play brings out new phases of its frailties. The new version accents the foolishness of Nora's concealing her forgery from the husband after his health is recovered. The play

proper gives her more motive in her fear of his scrupulous integrity. In the film it seems perfectly inane for her to go on pinching and saving to restore this money which was righteously forged for his life and death. A great gap is laid open; a scene should be placed here to present her argument. This super woman who says nothing and awaits the miracle where hubby will assume the stigma and repay her great sacrifice is all poppycock. It passes supremely over the composite crowd we write for. Of course, in the play the dramatist has dominated your mind with sustained interest in other passions. Anyhow, it's a great play as Ibsen wrote it.

*See page 922, July, 1918, *The Dramatist*.

ORPHANS OF THE STORM.

Great in Small Parts.

It is almost a mistake for a man like Griffith to attempt anything big in mass greatness after a triumph like "The Birth of a Nation," the greatest conflict in all screen history. All later scenes seem dim by contrast. He cannot rival his own record. The present picture is great, not in the proportions of the so-called storm, but in the suspense generated by repeated blasts at the sympathies in melodramatic moments taken from the celebrated play "The Two Orphans" and compounded into a double barrelled blow at the mother-love emotion.

Problem.

1. The aristocracy separates two orphans.
2. Revolution dissolves the aristocracy.
- The orphans are reunited.

This problem is highly generic but the play is not particularly concrete. This version is a liberal transposition of the original. It substitutes mass for intimate atmosphere and beneath all the flare and flourish of paper spears is the simple tale of two tender lassies torn apart by war but bound together by sisterly affection. They are not really sisters but in the great affinity of nature they are more than that. They are mother and child. The blind orphan is a baby in the mother heart of her loyal comrade. Circumstances have made them so. This is the dramatic chord that Griffith harps upon and makes the play his greatest emotional achievement. The scenic effects while good easily descend to second place.

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LUTHER B. ANTHONY, Editor

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QUARTERLY

1922

JULY

DEBOSHED DRAMA.

A Reflex of Social Evolution.

The moral evolution of Drama comes in mighty surges and we are now lost in the deeps of one of its highest billows. We are wallowing in a temporary trough of sensualism and pessimism. And the author who can look this unwholesome fungus in the face and recognize it as merely a mirrored phase of the wave we are groping through is indeed a fortunate craftsman. The morale of the world is taking a tumble and Drama feels the jolt. The world is lost to belief in anyone or anything, and Drama reflects this apathy of inept atheism.

This is the real origin of plays like *The Demi-Virgin*, *Ladies' Night*, *Lillies of the Field*, *The Rubicon*, *The Grand Duke*, *Enter Madame*, *Kiki* and *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. We need a great moral awakening to correct our Drama. But should this come through the channels of humanity first before it is embodied in the Conflicts of the theatre? You and I, your daughter and my daughter, your son and my son must shake off this stupid indif-

ference to current iniquities. Unbridled indulgence in appetite and impulse must vanish and we must rekindle our simmering consciences and reinstate spiritual ideas lest the whole fabric of civilized society skid to limbo.

Again, this is merely one of the throes of the great game of evolution. But evolution cannot progress without a leader. All social headway is heralded by man. Why cannot the dramatist be the first to recognize this big moment and mount the pulpit to preach this imperative need of the reclamation of the spirit. Even the playwright can find no mercenary field more profitable. No theme strikes deeper, no appetite knows a more enduring hunger in the hearts of humanity than spiritual regeneration. The dramatic author must seize this great opportunity. Conflicts on the stage properly dramatizing purification can purge the composite crowd quicker than all the sermons in the land. The call has never been clearer. Will the dramatic revivalist respond?

CAPTAIN APPLEJACK.

Quaint, Sweet and Simple.

Here and there we see symptoms of permanent playwriting as against the prevailing fad of tea room drama which occupies too much of our stage to-day. The "kick" is quickly determinable. Walter Hacket has passed his apprenticeship and offers a product which only in one instance reverts to the amateur.

Problem.

1. A faint-heart wins an adventuress.
2. He finds she is a thief.
3. He weds his ward.

The broken link in this chain is the Conclusion. How easy it would be to forge the connecting link. We have merely to inject the ward into the second clause, making her the means of detecting the thief-adventuress, and the Problem would be complete. Otherwise the comedy is quaint, sweet, and simple though not altogether unsophisticated. The humor is rich and the action often intricate. The author's playfulness frequently tempts him to run into travesty. But all in all "Captain Applejack" is one of the signs of the season. It is a fingerpost pointing back to the legitimate art of playwriting as opposed to the loose-leaf "Lilliom" ilk.

THE HAIRY APE.

Undramatized Sensation.

When an author cannot negotiate the dramatic form he intuitively attempts the same sensation through other channels. O'Neill's new play takes the brute force route and arrives dramatically nowhere. He gives excellent acting opportunity, as usual, at the cost of consistent Problem, Plot, Sequence, Motive and Drama. What he is aiming at, no one knows, and above all the hapless composite crowd he is retained to write for. The piece delivers a certain savage smash at the sensibilities to little or no emotional end.

Problem.

1. A coal-heaver is piqued at aristocracy.
2. He vows violent vengeance.
3. A gorilla gets him.

If you were writing a thesis in the kindergarten and offered this specimen as an efficiency test, the intelligence expert would put you in the Z Class.

But Mr. O'Neill gets by and goes a foot further in his wild ramifications stringing in the I. W. W., the Steel Syndicate, old General anarchy, and the de-evolution of the species. As a substitute for strong liquor this may be a blinding stimulant of some sort, but as drama it is sadly lacking in any of the essentials that formulate that Science. We are passing through a movie-stage transition where the audience does not know what it wants and the author who caters to them is lucky to strike a chaos empty enough to fill the order. This pot-pie answered for an hour.

FANNY HAWTHORNE.

"Hindle Wakes"* Rechristened.

We have been requested to reconsider this play in the light of modern technic as now revived at the Vanderbilt Theatre. There is nothing to add for its dramatic attainment. According to this code anyone could write a play who has the effrontery to defy any of our long-established conventions and come out flat-footed for social or civic anarchy. The next sophistry might be to declare that the father is not liable for the support of his offspring, or that the female of the species is not required to carry on the project of propogation.

A sensation may be created by any such reactionary insult, but still it does not spell Drama. "Hindle Wakes" bears no honor other than being an early forerunner of the play that gets its sole pull from exploiting "Woman's Wild Oats." It bears this one

distinction on the stage; it opened the campaign of personal liberty for ladies as opposed to full prohibition of prostitution. It advocates a sort of moonshine virginity.

THE DETOUR*.

Blend of Gloom and Humor.

In endeavoring to sop the sophisticated Owen Davis devised this peculiar blend of gloom and humor. The pretenders proved gullable and pronounced it a great play. Here is a delicious nip at the nincompoops who laud anything of sheer realism no matter how wide the detour from Drama.

Problem.

1. A wife skimps money to educate her daughter.
2. Her husband demands it to buy land.
3. The daughter's talent proves hopeless.

This is indeed realism without the faintest murmur of dramatic motive. It is a distressed picture of meaningless gloom ending in ironic hopelessness. There is no chance that Mr. Davis mistook this sophistry for Drama. No man knows the subtleties of this craft better than he does. He saw the tendency to worship the theatric imposter and scribbled off this imitation of the exotic works of the hour. And he won! Despite this joke on the dilettante the play has merit. His comedy is clever even though wrought at the expense of bone raw irony and derision. Note too, the unmistakable imprints of the master in handling acts, situations and in the stringent economy of structure.

* Little Brown & Co., Boston, \$1.50.

PEER GYNT.**Ibsen's Exotic Idea Drama.**

True to form, the Theatre Guild will produce "Peer Gynt" next season if present plans carry. The Guild could go a long way and not find less dramatic dogma. But while it is puerile as playbuilding it is a rich study of weird and wild enigmatic symbolism. Some people prefer this to drama. Drama properly constructed is a dream. This product is a nightmare. Instead of weaving a spell to hypnotize the composite crowd this play delves into a delirium of sensual and grotesque excesses leaving the audience to shift for itself as far as sense is concerned.

Problem.

1. A man goes the gamut of grotesque adventures.
2. His sweetheart waits for him.
3. He eventually dies.

This is about the scope of the heart action in "Peer Gynt." Ibsen's spiritual thesis is quite a different Problem. But in drama we are gauged by the emotions not by the author's intellectual intentions. It is this tendency to let thought supercede feeling that dedramatizes all of Ibsen's latter products; Brand, John Gabriel Borkman, Hedda Gabbler, Rosmersholm and When We Dead Awaken. He fails to fuse his pet theory into plot.

These plays will probably live as literature and die as drama. All good literature should live but whether a real play should is yet another question. Service may be its motto rather than permanence. The vital play is the popular play of the moment. Its appeal is immediate not promissory. Its real reward is HERE and NOW. Ideas are the things that live on eternally. And ideas are not drama.

In these plays Ibsen tries to dominate drama with thought and fails about as successfully as though he intended to disdain the spectator and write for the man in the book room. Most playwrights come to this exotic era eventually as the mental engulfs the emotional and all action runs to thought.

KICK-IN.

Close Knit Craftsmanship.

No play has quickened our sympathy with the crook more keenly than Willard Mack's graphic Conflict of the injustice to the honorable exodus from the underworld. The play has a TALKY Introduction and a leaky Conclusion but employs very clever technic particularly in its sympathetic appeal and primitive Suspense.

Problem.

1. A reclaimed crook is falsely accused.
2. He is about to be jailed.
3. His wife's pregnancy prevents.

Here you see the fallacy of the Conclusion. It is equivalent to a skillful operation in the hospital where the surgeon fails at appendicitis and pronounces it pip. A little courage would have worked it out. The author manifests far more ability in fabricating the first two acts than is needed to solve the last. He wrote two and one-half acts on the first law of nature and closed with the third law. His theme was self-preservation, in other words, and he flopped over to parental love for a finish. The audience was waiting for the wife's freedom, not her motherhood.

THE BRAT.**Good Waif Characterization.**

Some of our subscribers evidently caught by the clever character sketching in this play have asked us to analyze it. Characterization is its strongest point. The Dialog is commonplace and patchy, the plot is detached and clumsily constructed and the biplots are needless journeys to the troubles of other lives. Unity might dictate much more centralization of Conflict if its dictates were attended to.

Problem.

1. A novelist takes a waif for study.
2. His drunken brother loves the girl.
3. She learns that she loves him.

This is not a true report of Problem but it is the best that can be picked from a series of digressing fragments that do not vitally promote the normal trend of Plot. In other words, the heroine has personality but the plot has not. If any one story had been consistently developed it would be better for the virility of the play. There is much good comedy and a bunch of originality in the principle part. The author should study outlines of plot purpose.

THE COST OF HIGH SPICES.**Erotic Writers.**

On our tables and in the hands of our young people—and our married people, too—are now seen books which, in the maligned Victorian age—maligned because envied—would have been confined to the upper shelves of the debased collectors of erotic literature.

The primary intention of the writers of these books is, let us hope, generally mercenary. As a rule they have not the capacity to produce work that would attract by the merits which give the great authors their wide and undying circulation; so they fall back upon the evanescent attraction of high spices.

I said "let us hope" that the primary impulse of that literature is generally mercenary, because that is infinitely preferable to another impulse which is also unquestionably sometimes behind it—that of titillation—the impulse that sent Oscar Wilde to jail and is now clouding with baleful rumors the reputation of at least one American author.

It is remarkable that people of as much ability in some respects as some of these erotic writers should be so stupid in others. So far as they write to point a moral they fail to recognize that their erotic topics would be much more effective for literary purposes if they were kept in the background, as Shakespeare kept them in his plays ("Venus and Adonis" and "Lucrece" were indiscretions of his youth); and they also do not seem to be aware that in their titillations they attack the family, and so attack the whole fabric of civilization at its very foundation.

The family requires that the sexual passion be kept within limits. Within those limits the rousing of it by the beauty of the opposite sex is among the most beneficent and most productive processes of nature. But its titillation through the imagination is not a process of nature at all, and its indulgence, counter to the requirements of civilization, is malefi-

cent and destructive. It leads to more murders and suicides than all other causes put together.

The literature is part of the crime wave, but against this crime, or any other, mere law is not enough. So far as the world is kept in order it is vastly more by public opinion and the social penalties than by law. If the producers of this literature could not get into decent houses or decent clubs there would soon be an end to it.—Henry Holt in the *New York Times*.

SCREEN PORTRAITURE.

Heroines or Hags.

Fortunate is the actress who finds a photographer who can capture all the flickering glimpses that nature offers the movie lense. She may be beautiful or she may be merely a happy camera shot. In either instance she requires complete co-operation to render either the beauty she is famed for or the quality of comeliness that the movie fan exacts. In the pursuit of other essentials this prime photographic factor is too frequently overlooked. And hags of all hues of hideousness confront us as images of the heroine's physiognomy.

A startling example is an attempt to picture Gloria Swanson in "Beyond the Rocks." Perhaps first place was focused for the male in this picture. Perhaps the actress' make-up was at fault. Perhaps the timing of exposure or print was miscalculated. Whatever the flaw may be, it does seem that the technical error might be eliminated when reputations of both producer and star are at stake. Compare this blemish with a lessor event like Hugo Ballin's wonderful filming of "Jane Eyre" which not

only retains the truth of story but runs the gamut of long and close portraiture even surpassing our fondest ideals of the heroine.

If a separate portrait artist is needed place him in the camera corps. Certainly some specific attention should be given to this particular point. The man who worms out the continuity is often too oblivious to its fate. Watch your women! They do not have to be pretty to captivate. But the heroine of a paramount picture need not be magnified into a blotchy, repulsive hard-featured hag.

THE FAMILY MAN.*

No Nearer The Dramatic Goal.

Galsworthy is passing through a laundry for soiled linens and insists upon holding up a few foul fabrics. Just why, we are not able to see, for there is no meaning in it. There is less point in "The Family Man" than in that putrid muck-slinging exhibition; "The Skin Game." If Mr. Galsworthy has a purpose, he is not uttering it in dramatic language. Even his novelistic force is enfeebled by this semblance of dramatic form and the audience receives neither fish nor fowl.

Problem.

1. A family balks at a father's tyranny.
2. The father canes his daughter in a row.
3. He is arrested, pardoned and reconciled.

If you can glean any message in all this unsavory muss you deduce it by undramatic methods. For

* Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York, \$1.00.